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MISS·ERIN

BY

M·E·FRANCIS

MISS ERIN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MAIME O' THE CORNER

IN A NORTH-COUNTRY VILLAGE

THE STORY OF DAN

A DAUGHTER OF THE SOIL

FRIEZE AND FUSTIAN

AMONG THE UNTRODDEN WAYS

WHITHER?

MISS ERIN

BY

M. E. FRANCIS
(Mrs FRANCIS BLUNDELL)

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET, W.C.
LONDON
1898

ALM5998

TO

K. M. S.

THIS STORY IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

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MISS ERIN

PART I.—SEED-TIME

CHAPTER I

A LEGACY

"IS this the place, I wonder?" thought the solitary wayfarer. "God help us! Of all the lonesome God-forsaken spots!"

He had raised his head, hitherto bent downwards in the effort to advance in the teeth of a cutting October wind, and now paused, looking about him irresolutely. It was a desolate place, certainly, this low square house, as seen from the rickety gate near which the traveller stood; a house which had once been white, but which was now weather-stained into an indefinable hue, battered by the elements, unspeakably forlorn, a pair of mock windows staring from the upper storey blankly, like wide-open eyes in a dead face. Near the gate, a few almost leafless oaks and beeches writhed in the wind, and close to the house the grass-grown slope was thickly studded with gloomy gigantic fir-trees. The path was overgrown with moss, the low wall separating the enclosure from the road broken down in many places; a lean, miserable-looking cow was cropping the rank grass languidly, but no other sign of life was apparent, not even a squirrel in the branches, not a wandering clutch of chickens.

"Well—in the name o' God!" said the traveller, heaving a sigh. He wrapped his great frieze coat closer round the bundle in his arms and lifted the rusty latch, uttering an exclamation of disgust as the gate, which had been insecurely supported by broken hinges, fell flat on the ground.

"There doesn't come many visitors here, I 'll be bound," he muttered, stooping awkwardly to restore it to its place; "an' no wonder! I 'll be glad when I 'm out of it myself."

Having propped it up again, he went on his way slowly, looking cautiously to right and to left as though he expected some enemy to spring on him from the shelter of the fir-trees. At last he stood before the porch, and once more scanned the house; not a ray of light, no sign or sound of any living thing.

"Is there anyone in it at all?" he said to himself; and then, plucking up his courage, he pulled vigorously at the bell, proceeding after a moment or two to thump the door sturdily with his heavy fist; repeating this operation at intervals with increasing energy as he grew exasperated by the delay.

At last steps were heard approaching, a variety of bolts were withdrawn, and after much rattling and fumbling, the lock shot back and the door opened.

A woman's face peered out into the rapidly-increasing dusk: ghost-like, as seen thus against the background of absolutely dark passage.

"Go away!" she cried sharply. "We've nothing for you—we never encourage tramps here."

"Thank ye kindly, ma'am," responded the traveller warmly, "it's time enough for ye to talk that way

when I ask for anything. I 've nothin' at all to say to you, ma'am, but I 'd be obliged to Mr Fitzgerald if he 'd step here a minute."

"Aha, that 's the usual story," retorted the woman; "but you 'll not find it easy to take in my master, I can tell you. If you will take my advice, you 'll clear out of this before he catches ye and gets ye taken up for a vagabond."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, if you plaze," cried the other, drawing himself up with dignity, "an' tell your master that Michael Dooley, *Misther* Michael Dooley of Lincoln Creek, California, United States of America, 'ud be glad of a word with him. An' I guess you 'd best tell him I 've got something for him."

"Something for him!" echoed the housekeeper in astonishment. "What 's your name, do you say?"

"Misther Michael Dooley," repeated the owner of that title with great gravity. "Ask him to be quick, if you plaze—I 'll have to be makin' tracks."

After a moment's reflection, the woman apparently decided that he was not an impostor, and though she first took the precaution of closing the door in his face, she departed willingly enough to do his errand. Presently the door opened again just sufficiently wide to admit of another face being thrust through the aperture. A man's face, this time, pallid and keen-featured, with bright eyes set near together under black brows; so much Dooley could see even in the fast-fading light.

"I don't know your name," said the newcomer suspiciously. "What do you want with me?"

"I've brought ye somethin' from California, sir,"

replied Dooley gruffly, "an' I'll thank ye to let me in to hand it over, an' not leave me coolin' my heels all night on this blasted ould doorstep—now!"

"What have you brought me?" asked Fitzgerald, opening the door a little wider.

"I 've got a letther for ye from your brother in California, that he wrote when he was dying. It's about a small leggicy he's left ye. He asked me to see an' give it to ye with my own hands, because he knew I was comin' over for a while to the ould counthry. 'Mike,' says he, so pitiful, 'will ye pass me your word to take it safe?' 'I will,' says I, an' so here I am."

"So Gerald is dead?" said the old man, with perfect unconcern. "Only lately, too? Ha! I thought he died long ago. And he left me a legacy, did he? It won't be worth much, I should think, coming from that quarter! However, we'll see; hand over the letter."

"Beggin' your pardon, Misther Fitzgerald, my instructions was to give ye the letther with my own hands an' see ye read it. By your leave, then, I'll step inside along with ye. A cat couldn't see to read here."

He pushed open the door, and walked unceremoniously past Mr Fitzgerald into the narrow hall. The latter hesitated for a moment, but presently calling for a light, pushed his visitor's burly figure on one side, and led the way into a small room on the right-hand side, which was apparently his private sanctum. A battered centre-table, a few chairs, and a heavy mahogany writing-table, formed the only furniture of this retreat, unless one might include the piles of musty-smelling, dilapidated-looking books which were

heaped up on the floor, and littered over chairs and tables. The plaster of the ceiling bulged out in many places and was deeply stained with damp, and here and there the sodden paper had peeled away from the wall. Through the curtainless windows the trees without could be seen distorting themselves in the violent blast. Dooley shuddered as he looked about him ; never, he thought, had he seen such a dismal room.

"The letter, please," said Fitzgerald, recalling his attention by stretching out his hand. It was a cruel hand, long-fingered, bony, icy-cold to the other's touch. The face which presently bent over the unfolded paper was a cruel face, too, yet with a certain remnant of beauty in it, even a faint resemblance to the poor dead brother who had been the traveller's friend.

For a moment or two nothing was heard save the cracking of the letter and the shriek and moaning of the wind through the creaking boughs outside; but presently, with a muttered exclamation, Fitzgerald crumpled up the paper in his hand and turned fiercely on his visitor.

"What is the meaning of it?" he cried.

With curiously fumbling fingers, and a sudden flush on his bronzed cheeks, Dooley began to undo the wrappings of the bundle in his arms. First an old cloak was removed, and then a knitted shawl, and at last, drawing carefully aside sundry folds of flannel, he showed Fitzgerald—a little child's sleeping face. A fine babe about six months old, with long black lashes lying on its round cheek, and silky dusky down just visible under its shabby bonnet.

"This is your leggicy, sir," said Dooley, with a

quaver in his voice. "The only child of your dead brother. Its mother died just after it was born, an' poor Misther Gerald himself, I may say, only lived long enough to see it christened and give it his blessin' and bid me take it to you. It's your own flesh and blood, Misther Fitzgerald, your own darlin' little niece, an orphan child with only you to look to in the wide world—for, for the sake o' them that's gone, ye'll be a father to it?"

He paused, appalled at the expression of the other's face. Poor little baby girl! if looks could kill, it would have been all over with her there and then. But, unconscious that her fate was under discussion, she slept placidly on, the tiny bosom rising and falling, one minute hand lying open with wee fingers outspread on the flannel wrap.

"To begin with," said Fitzgerald, speaking at last with studied calmness, "to begin with, I have no proof that this *is* my brother's child, and if it were, what have I to do with it? Who was its mother — where are her people? What" — with gathering fury—"what the devil do you bring the bantling to me for?"

"Bedad, it is your brother's child an' no wan else's, an' isn't the raison I'm bringin' it to yo' there in his letter plain enough? The poor little creature, if it had anywhere else to go it isn't here I'd be lavin' it, God help it! The mother was a poor slip of an orphan girl with ne'er a friend in the world. She came out to the States thinkin' to make her fortune, but she couldn't get on in service someway; an' Misther Gerald came across her, and thought she'd maybe be gettin' into throuble out there, an' so he married her to keep her out of

harm's way. An' afther a couple o' years the little wan was born, an' the wife died. Misther Gerald was very bad himself before she went, an' niver held up his head afther. He just lived, I may say, to take the little wan in his arms—'Call her Erin,' he says——"

Here the other broke in with a sardonic laugh.

"Just like his tomfoolery! Yes, I can believe the child is his—no one but Gerald Fitzgerald would have been capable of such idiocy. To marry a servant at fifty years of age—to call his brat *Erin*, the fool!—and then to try and palm it off on *me*! I never was on good terms with him at the best of times, and after his doings in '48—why, if by raising a finger I could have saved him from transportation I would not have done so! There, take the brat away—I'll have nothing to say to it!"

"Glory be to God!" ejaculated honest Michael Dooley, turning quite pale with alarm and disgust. "What am I to do with the poor infant, then? Sure I have no way of keepin' it. I'm a bachelor, so I am; sure I was hard set to get the poor child here at all—if it wasn't for a woman coming over at the same time as myself I don't know what I'd have done. Besides, I'm a poor man, sir, an'——"

"Take it to the workhouse," interrupted Fitzgerald, "that's the proper place for it—the child of a convict and a beggar. Be off with it!"

"'Deed, then, I'll do no such thing!" shouted Dooley indignantly. "Ye ought to be ashamed o' yerself, ye black-hearted rogue. Is it send your own brother's child to the workhouse? An' castin' up at the dead, God forgive ye, convict, indeed!

Misther Gerald was a better gentleman than you, sir. I 'll not be the wan to take his child to the workhouse. Ye may do the dirty job yerself, ye mean ould villain! There 's the child"—laying his burden down gently on the table—"I done my duty in givin' it into your care, an' I wash my hands o' the rest."

"If you leave it here," said the other, with cold fury, "I shall fling it out of the window after you. I have nothing to say to it, I tell you, and refuse to have it in my house."

He laid hold of the poor little thing's dress as he spoke so roughly as to put an end even to the heavy sleep which Dooley's fellow-passenger had, in pure kindness of heart, endeavoured to ensure by means of a certain soothing drug.

The waxen lids were lifted, and a pair of large startled blue eyes looked round; the little mouth drooped, the tiny hands clenched themselves. The child was not yet sufficiently awake to cry, but these mute signs touched her whilom protector's kind heart.

"God help ye!" he said; "I 'd as soon leave ye in a wolf's den as here. Hand her over then. I 'll take her out o' this for the night anyhow, but after that we 'll see if the law o' the land won't step in to make ye provide for your own flesh and blood."

Mr Fitzgerald smiled without replying, and loosed his hold of the baby's robe; and Dooley, tenderly wrapping it up again, prepared to depart; stooping suddenly, as his host preceded him with the light, to snatch up the letter which the latter had thrown on the floor.

"We 'll have the child's credentials anyhow," he observed, thrusting it into his breast pocket.

Fitzgerald paused, as though to expostulate, but shrugged his shoulders after a moment and went on down the passage, opening the door very politely, and standing beside it while Dooley went out shivering into the night air.

"I hope you'll sleep well," he observed, "and that the infant won't disturb you."

"If it wasn't for the blessed child in my arms, I'd knock ye into smithereens," muttered Dooley, pausing to look round at the sardonic face grinning in the lamplight; and then, controlling his rising anger with an effort, he went on down the slippery path among the fir-trees and out at the rickety gate; the wind, which had been apparently lying in wait for him, sweeping down on him as he emerged from the shelter of the trees, and driving him before it as he retraced his steps towards the station.

A cold rain began to fall, too, and the poor fellow, tired, hungry, burdened with a terrible infant, which might at any moment awake and clamour for the unattainable, was almost at his wits' end.

Presently he became aware of a figure advancing towards him, also struggling with the elements, a tall figure, of which only the lower limbs, partially enveloped in a long coat were visible, the rest of the person being intrenched behind a huge open umbrella which came charging along the path at a prodigious rate, and the ferule of which came into violent contact with Dooley's arm hastily flung out to protect the baby.

"Mind out there!" he shouted. "Look where ye're goin'!" knocking up the umbrella so violently that the owner's hat went spinning into the road. "Oh, by the powers! I ax your pardon, yer

reverence, I didn't see who was in it at all. I humbly beg your pardon."

The old priest picked up his hat good-humouredly, replaced it on his thick white locks, and adjusted the Roman collar, a glance at which had caused Dooley to become aware of his mistake.

"Well, my good man, you didn't quite knock me down, but you went very near it. It seems to be a word and a blow with you."

"Why, then, indeed, sir, I have a way of rising my hand before I know where I am. I was afeard on account o' the child here—that was wan thing that put me about."

"Oh, the child?" repeated the old man, endeavouring to peer at him through the darkness. "You have got a child there, have you? Well, well, one must make allowances for a father's feelings."

"Ah, yer reverence, this is no child of mine. The father, God be merciful to him, is in his grave this six months nearly, ay, an' the mother too. Over beyant in California, sir. Ay, indeed!"

"Let 's see," said the priest, coming closer to him, "I don't seem to know your voice. What is your name, and who is this poor child?"

Michael Dooley gave his name and former address with precision and pride, and introduced the infant as the only child of one Gerald Fitzgerald of Glenmor in these parts, of whom his reverence might perchance have "heard tell."

"He had to—go out o' the counthry afther '48, ye know, sir. Ye'll have heard of Fitzgerald's Band, that time? He used to have the boys up in the hills I believe, drillin' them, an' all sorts——"

"Gerald Fitzgerald!" cried the other in deep

emotion. "Yes, indeed, I knew him—a fine lad, a fine, brave, generous, foolish lad! And so he is dead! May God have mercy on his soul!"

He stood still for a moment looking upwards, heedless of the driving rain and the blustering wind in which the umbrella bobbed aimlessly about, now forwards, now sideways.

"Where are you taking the child to?" he asked presently.

"Where indeed, yer reverence? I 'm afther takin' her to that blasted—I ax yer pardon, sir—to that outrageous ould villain her uncle, sir, at Glenmor, beyant, an' he bid me take the brat away to the workhouse. Said he 'd be the death of her if I left her. So what could I do but take her along with me again, and it 's at my wits' ends I am to know what to do next. I 'm expectin' every minute she 'll be wakin' up on me and callin' out for a drink—an' what 'll I do then?"

"Haven't you got a boat or a bottle or whatever they call the thing to feed her with, man?"

"Not a thing, father, at all. There was a poor woman in the ship that looked after her for me comin' over, and previously to that a neighbour in the next ranch took her. I 'm a bachelor myself, and 'pon my word I couldn't for the life o' me tell how they managed—I think it 's a spoon Mrs Murphy —that 's the woman that had her in the steamer— used to feed her with, but I never took any particular notice. I 've never had anything to say to a child before—no, nor a woman, not sence my poor mother died—the Lord have mercy on her soul!—an' it 's astray altogether I am now. Sure I thought as soon as I took her to her father's people she 'd be

off my hands for good—an' the uncle—her father's own brother serves me this dirty trick! What in the world 'ill I do, your reverence?"

The priest who, little as he understood the position of affairs, shared the honest fellow's perplexity and indignation, could not help being amused nevertheless. He was beginning some laughing rejoinder when Miss Erin, roused by the cold air and the eager voices, waked up thoroughly this time—stretched—and began to utter loud and imperative cries.

"Come to my house!" cried the old priest, for the nonce as dismayed as Erin's protector. "We'll find you some milk and a spoon there, anyhow; and there's my housekeeper, Moll Riddick, she's a host in herself. *She'll* know what to do!"

Off set the two men at a brisk trot, the perspiration starting out on Dooley's forehead in the intensity of his anxiety, and the priest endeavouring to hold the umbrella over the child, and uttering at the same time disjointed pieces of advice to her bearer, his long experience in christenings rendering him an authority on such matters.

"Hold her up, man—up against your shoulder—don't smother her, you know. Now, pat her gently on the back—*gently*! Don't hammer the poor little thing as if she was a twopenny nail."

"Och, be the powers!" groaned Dooley. "If ever I let myself in for this sort of work again."

Meanwhile, in spite of their united exertions, little Erin wailed, and bobbed her hapless head against Michael's rough coat, and beat the air with furious feeble hands. At last they arrived, all equally breathless, at the priest's house, and entered a warm, bright parlour; a small boy, with a rough head and

a queer freckled face hastily appearing in answer to his master's summons.

"Fetch a cup of milk and a teaspoon, Patsy—run for your life! And where's Moll Riddick? Tell her she's wanted at once!"

"She's stepped down beyant to the shop," returned Patsy; "she said she'd be back soon."

"Dear, dear, everything is against us!" groaned his master. "Well, fetch the milk anyhow, Pat. Now, Michael Dooley, my poor fellow, you must do the best you can yourself. Sit down there in that chair and take off the child's cloak! Man alive, don't haul at the strings like that. A baby's neck, you know—there isn't much of it at the best of times, and what there is, isn't very solid. That's it—make her sit up on your knee. Now, here's the milk—hold the cup lower, Patsy—now!"

The big old white-haired man stooped, resting his hands on his knees and bending his face till it was almost on a level with that of the child, who, pacified for the moment, sat blinking at the cup in apparently pleasant anticipation. Patsy on the other side, holding the milk at a convenient angle, watched operations with equal surprise and interest. The excitement of both onlookers indeed became breathless, when Dooley, purple in the face, and with his eyes almost starting out of his head, seized the spoon with clumsy shaking fingers and endeavoured to—"prize" the baby's mouth open much as if it had been an oyster.

After one moment's pause of unutterable indignation, it is needless to say that the said little round mouth opened to its fullest extent, and that a series of piercing shrieks rewarded Dooley's well-meant endeavours.

"God bless us, man! what do you think the child's made of?" cried the priest, hardly less disturbed. "'Pon my word! I'd make a better hand of it myself. Give me that spoon—now, hold her steady."

Michael humbly and in deep confusion surrendered the spoon, and his reverence going down on his knees once more tendered it to the baby, his own mouth tightly screwed up, and his eyes showing wide with anxiety through his big silver-mounted glasses.

There was a short silence in the room, broken only by the clink of the spoon against the glass; but presently Miss Erin Fitzgerald's toes were seen to kick and wriggle under her frock, and her tiny hands clenched themselves, and all at once, back went the little dark head against Dooley's supporting hand, and screams resounded through the room.

There was a pause at length, and then Michael observed diffidently, "Ye're afther spillin' a lot on her frock, yer reverence, my hand's quite wet"—and then in a lower tone, "I think the most of the milk went that way—I—I don't think she got any of it at all!"

The dismayed silence which ensued was broken by the sound of hasty feet, and Moll Riddick, the housekeeper, entered the room, starting back rigid with astonishment at the scene before her.

"In the name of Heaven! Father Lalor, will ye tell me the meaning of this? Whose child is that, an' what's it doin' here in the best parlour?"

"Oh, woman dear, this is no time for questions!" returned her master in distracted tones. "Take the child and see if you can't get her to swallow some of that milk, or else she'll be having a fit before our eyes."

Miss Riddick, being a good-hearted woman, and not more tyrannical than the generality of priests' housekeepers, sat down with a muttered remonstrance but stretched out her arms willingly enough for the child, which Dooley almost flung into them. It was true that she had never hitherto tried to feed a baby, but she was a first-rate hand at cramming young turkeys, and therefore set about her present task with the confidence born of long experience in the management of callow things.

Obviously, when a chick of any kind is to be fed, and it is obliging enough of its own accord to open its mouth, it would be foolish indeed not to profit by such an opportunity of putting something into it. Therefore, when Erin once more renewed the expostulations, interrupted for a few moments by want of breath, Miss Riddick proceeded to ladle in the milk with so much speed and deftness that not only were the cries immediately put an end to, but the little creature's life narrowly escaped the same fate.

Dooley uttered a kind of howl, followed by a fine round oath, which Father Lalor was too much preoccupied to reprove. Indeed, his own consternation and wrath were almost equal to that of his visitor, and darting across the room he possessed himself of the choking child, announcing in indignant tones that he was not going to stay there and see it murdered.

It was at this moment, the uproar and confusion being at its height, that Patsy, always intelligent and prompt in emergencies, made a suggestion which not only called forth the gratitude of the assembled company, but influenced the whole of Erin Fitzgerald's subsequent career.

"If yez 'ud take her down to our little place," he remarked, "my mother 'ud soon pacify her. The littlest of them at home is about as big as this wan —there's always little wans at our place, an' my mother never has them shoutin' that way."

"Pat, my boy, you have more wisdom than any of us," cried the priest joyfully. "Run on and tell her we're coming. Now, Moll Riddick, see if you can carry this child without hurting it or dropping it—where's its cloak? Come, Moll, distinguish yourself —Faith! what's the use of being a woman if you don't know how to handle a baby?"

"It's the contrairiest little creature I ever had a hoult of," grumbled Moll; "an' it's enough to drive a body demented to hear it screechin'."

"Never mind, Mary Nolan will put a stop to all that! Come along, Mr Dooley; now, Moll, lead the way."

CHAPTER II

ROUND THE TURF FIRE

AFTER a few minutes' brisk walking, the little procession came to a village; the three tiny shops, which were its chief boast, brave with lights, while here and there down the irregular street an occasional gleam shone out from some cottage door or window. But Moll Riddick, closely followed by the priest and Dooley, stalked on without pausing till she came to a small cottage about a hundred yards from the rest of the hamlet. Its whitewashed walls were clearly defined in the dusk, while from the open doorway issued a stream of ruddy light, brightening even the closely-cropped hedge which seemed to enclose a tiny garden. On the threshold in the middle of this light stood the figure of a little woman, who rushed [illegible] her visitors as soon as she caught sight of [illegible] and almost snatched the wailing child out [illegible] arms.

[illegible] ob; what are

[illegible] safe to utter,

[illegible] pastor now

[illegible] but, swiftly

[illegible] into the warm

[illegible]'s wails giving

[illegible]ly by occasional

"That's the way with her whenever she can lay hands on a child, your reverence!" remarked a queer, high-pitched, cracked voice from the neighbourhood of the door, and Dooley perceived for the first time two figures standing in the narrow passage which intervened between it and the kitchen. In one he recognised Patsy, while the other, a taller, broader edition of the same, was evidently his father.

"I do be tellin' her many a time she'd like to take charge of all the children in the parish. It's a bit for a beggar's babby one time, and another time she'll be mindin' a neighbour's pack, and us with near a dozen of our own!"

"Ah, don't mind him, sir," cried the woman from within. "He likes to be havin' a bit o' fun with me. But won't ye step in for a minute, Father Lalor, you an' the honest man there? The blessed child is quiet an' happy now."

Father Lalor complied, and Dooley and Moll Riddick followed him into a little low kitchen with an earthen floor and whitewashed walls, decorated with coloured prints, while a fine display of crockery gleamed in the flickering light from the shelves of the dresser. On the opposite side was a deal table spread with preparations for a meal; a pot hissed and bubbled over the turf-fire, the smell of the smoking stir-about being pleasant in Dooley's nostrils. A girl of about twelve was peeling a dish of steaming potatoes in a corner, two or three younger ones sat on the floor before the fire, and Mrs Nolan gently rocked with one foot a clumsy wooden cradle, the while with many tender words she endeavoured to hush to sleep the now contented stranger baby.

Mrs Nolan was a little woman, as has been said,

and her face, seamed and worn by much care, had lost not only every trace of beauty, but of youth. Yet, in its honesty, its simplicity, and a certain curious refinement and purity which all the wear and tear of life had been unable to diminish, it was still undeniably pleasant to look on. Brown soft eyes, innocent as those of her youngest born, a smile that lit up the homely face with a sudden unexpected brightness; quiet gentle ways, a soft voice — one might journey far before meeting so sympathetic or attractive a personality as that of this poor little ignorant hard-working Irish mother. It was, perhaps, because her motherliness appealed to people so forcibly, that in her limited sphere she was so much beloved, and that even chance acquaintances like Dooley succumbed at once to her influence. As the big burly man sat down upon the settle which "wan o' the little girls" at a sign from Mrs Nolan pushed forward, he gazed at her with a sort of reverence, the more singular that he was, if anything, her senior;—and thought with new tenderness of his own poor old mother, long at rest, under the daisy quilt yonder in County Kerry.

"Moll Riddick, come here and take a lesson," cried Father Lalor, seating himself in the only elbow-chair which the establishment possessed. "See, now —that's the way to hold a child."

"Tut, sir, it's easy talkin'," retorted Moll. "It 'ud be a queer thing if Mrs Nolan didn't know how to manage a baby, an' her wi' ten o' them. Is it ten or eleven ye have, ma'am?"

"Oh, come, Miss Riddick, ye're givin' us more than our due," put in papa Nolan facetiously. "Nine's our number, so far. Wan for every chore of angels.

An' we're not that covetous as to be axin' for any more. We're quite satisfied, ma'am, I assure you."

"Unless the Lord sends them, the poor little things!" added his wife. "An' even if He does, He'll know how to take care of them."

"Well said, Mary Nolan!" exclaimed the priest. "Michael Dooley, you and I can take a lesson from this. Here we've been breaking our hearts and cracking our brains about this babe which nobody wants, but which God has seen fit to send into the world. Come, man, cheer up! As Mary here says, He that sent it will know how to take care of it. Meanwhile, we must lay our heads together and see what's best to be done. This is Mr Gerald Fitzgerald's child, Mary. You remember Mr Gerald, don't you? And Pat—you do, of course."

Of course they did: had not Mary, as a slip of a little girl goin' to school, stood many a time to see him riding by, such a fine, handsome young gentleman, with a smile and a kind word for everyone? And had not Pat once, when a lad, surreptitiously watched the drilling of Fitzgerald's band of confederates, and heard his burning words—ay, and seen the boys chair him through the village to the smithy when he had instructed the blacksmith as to the best method of making pikes? Remember him! They should just think they did. And was this his child? Why, now that they thought of it, she favoured him too; she was the very moral of him, indeed, Miss Riddick opined.

"Ay, but she has the mother's eyes," said Dooley. "Beautiful eyes they were, too. Real Irish eyes, Misther Gerald used to say. I believe it was for them mostly he took to the poor lonesome young thing—'I couldn't see those Irish eyes clouded with trouble

or tears,' he said, an' so he went an' married poor Maggie Brophy that hadn't a ha'porth of her own, an' couldn't so much as write her name."

"That is certainly characteristic of Gerald," returned Father Lalor, with something between a laugh and a sob. "But, Mr Dooley, you must tell us all about it from first to last, please. We must know the story, and then we must think about the child's future."

So Michael Dooley began his tale, his eyes wandering the while from one to another of his hearers, who soon became numerous, as, one by one, the representatives of the "nine chores of angels" came creeping near, some from the inner room, and some from hitherto unnoticed corners of the kitchen. Patrick Nolan senior snuffed the dip candle occasionally with his finger and thumb, or thrust his heel into the burning sods on the hearth, so that a momentary flame darted up the chimney, irradiating the rugged features of the speaker or the placid face of the babe who lay broad awake on Mary's knee, staring solemnly at the glowing embers and stretching out lazy little limbs in evident enjoyment of the comfort and security afforded by this inimitable cradle.

Michael related to the little group how this Gerald Fitzgerald, whom the seniors had all known and loved, and who, for his speeches and writings in '48, was convicted of treason-felony and sentenced to fifteen years' transportation, had been included in the amnesty granted to the leaders of the movement some time later. Making his way to America, he led for many years a wandering and unsuccessful life in the Western States; and

at last, when no longer young, entering into partnership with honest Michael himself. They had farmed a small ranch together, and it was on a journey undertaken on some business connected with their little estate that Gerald had come across his future wife, then newly arrived from Ireland and almost destitute. Her big blue eyes, her simplicity and her forlorn condition, touched the heart of the quixotic melancholy man, and he brought home to the Californian ranch, as his bride, this peasant girl who might, with equal propriety, have been installed there as his servant. Contrary to what might have been expected, however, the union turned out exceedingly well, and for almost two years the elderly bridegroom was childishly happy. But it was decreed that his career was not to end in less troubled a fashion than it had begun, and even while this hapless wedded pair—of whom one was scarcely more fit to battle with the world than the other—were looking forward joyfully to the spring which should see them with a child in their arms, pecuniary ruin stared them in the face. It was long before Michael Dooley could bring his partner to realise this fact, but at last he made him understand that their farming operations had resulted in disastrous failure, and that unless they all intended to starve together, they must make up their minds to start life afresh. After much vacillation, Gerald decided that as soon as the babe was born he would return to more civilised regions and endeavour to procure employment on the staff of some newspaper. His former connection with the *Nation* and *United Irishman* well qualified him for such a post, but it was characteristic of the man that he would

not consent to have recourse to this expedient until it was clear to him that no other means of livelihood was in his power. His pen, he said, had hitherto been dedicated to the service of his country, his work given freely out of an unbounded love; it seemed to him a degradation and desecration to make of it now a mere mercenary thing—he would almost as soon think of patching a counterpane with the national flag, or twanging for hire the harp that hung in Tara.

But, after all, the poor romantic Young Irelander was never required to make this sacrifice. Almost before he had ceased to put forward samples with regard to the new shaping of his life, he was in the grip of a deadly disease; and the babe so eagerly longed for opened its blue eyes on a world to which its mother's were already closing, and was cradled in the arms of a father soon to loose his hold of all earthly things.

Michael's impressionable little audience interrupted him at this point with many groans and smothered laments, and it was in rather a shaky voice that he himself, as soft-hearted and easily moved as any of them, continued:

"Well, when she was to be christened, some was for callin' her Mary, that the Blessed Virgin might take her from the first under her protection, an' some thought she ought to be Maggie, afther the poor young mother lyin' dead in the next room. Misther Gerald himself didn't seem to be noticing anything much, only lying there with his arms round the child, singin' to it now an' again; but he looks up all at once, 'Call her Erin,' says he, loud and firm. 'Erin shall be her name, as the last proof of her father's love

for his country an' hers. O Erin!' he says, risin' his head from the pillow and tryin' to lift the child in his arms, 'I have indeed loved thee, all that I had was thine—I would joyfully have given my life for thee! Behold,' he says, 'I dedicate to thee this child, the only thing in the world that I can still call my own. With my last breath I consecrate her to thee——'"

Dooley here broke off suddenly; sobs were heard in the little room, and tears fell on baby Erin's frock: even the priest, though not so easily carried away as those simple and susceptible peasant folk, wiped his spectacles surreptitiously.

"Poor Gerald!" he said huskily, "it's just like him,—just of a piece with his whole life! Romantic, and—and—foolish, and unpractical even on his death-bed! God bless him, dear fellow! God send rest to that beautiful unquiet childish soul of his! But I wish he had called the little one Mary!"

"Or even a Saint's name," muttered little snub-nosed Bridget from her mother's side.

"Well then, now, your reverence, I beg lave to differ from you," cried Patrick Nolan, who, as a subscriber to the *Weekly Freeman*, and something of a scholar, was entitled to speak with authority. "What better name could ye give the child than the name o' the Island o' Saints, her that evangelised the whole world? Sure, what would ye have holier or better than that? Only it took a grand clever mind like Misther Gerald's to think of it. Bedad, Mary, I think the next little wan we have we 'll call Armagh, afther St Pathrick's Cathedral."

Everyone laughed a little at this, though it is only due to Mr Nolan to observe that he really made the

suggestion in good faith; and presently Dooley resumed.

"Poor Misther Gerald fretted a good bit at first about what was to become of the poor child, and he wrote, bit by bit, a letter to his brother, asking him for God's sake to look after her. 'I don't think he can have the heart to refuse, Mike,' he'd say. 'He was never a kind brother to me, but I was a wild lad, an' gave him trouble often enough; but this little helpless babe, with no one but him in the wide world—a little girl, too, he *couldn't* be cruel to her, could he?' 'Indeed he couldn't,' says I, an' I raly thought it. 'There's nowhere else for her to go,' says he, an' then he'd sigh an' kiss the child and maybe smile. 'Little one, you're going to Ireland,' he'd whisper in its ear, 'you shall see Ireland, baby.' So, as soon as the poor gentleman was buried, and I'd settled things up a bit out there, I came away with her. Every wan I met, I may say, was kind an' lovin' to the poor little orphan. Mrs Murphy, a poor woman that was comin' home to Dublin, and looked after her all the way, got that fond of her, she was near breakin' her heart afther her at lavin' her. So I left the child's bits o' things at the station beyant, a while ago, thinkin' to myself that Misther Fitzgerald 'ud send for them as soon as I got there, an' off with me, up the hill to Glenmor. An' if th' ould villain beyant didn't chuck me out an' bid me take the brat to the workhouse. 'If ye leave it there,' says he, 'I'll pitch it out of the window after ye.'"

"God bless us!" murmured Mary Nolan, clasping the child closer to her tender bosom. "Oh, father, what'll become of the poor darlin' at all?"

"See, here's poor Misther Gerald's letther," pursued

Michael. "I picked it up off the ground where th' ould robber thrown it. See where he says at the end, God help him! 'Brother, I only ask you for what the poorest peasant in Ireland would not refuse—house-room and food for an orphan child, your own flesh and blood.'"

"Oh, Pat," cried Mary, stretching out her hand impulsively to her husband, "Pat, do you hear that? 'The poorest peasant in Ireland—' Oh, Pat, avick, let us keep the poor little angel ourselves while we have a roof over our heads."

"There, ye hear her, Father Lalor! That's Mary Nolan for ye," returned honest Pat, blinking his little blue eyes, and twisting his face in the queerest mixture of emotion and perplexity. "Us, that many a time has to see our own go hungry, and that never knows from one year to another how soon we may be turned out on the road! Ye may well say 'while we've a roof over our heads,' Mary. How long will that be, an' how will Miss Fitzgerald like to be thrown in a ditch with the rest of us some day? Upon my word!" beginning to laugh at last, "this is the place to eddicate a young lady! She'll do us credit, runnin' about barefoot in the lane. She'll——"

"Never mind, Mary!" interrupted the priest, seeing tears of vexation and confusion start into Mrs Nolan's eyes. "It was a kind and charitable thought, and God will bless you for it! But, of course, such a thing couldn't be seriously spoken of. No, no, we must get Mr Fitzgerald to realise his responsibilities. I will talk to him to-morrow, and meanwhile, Mary, you good creature, if you will undertake this poor little creature for to-night, it

will be an immense weight off Mr Dooley's mind, I 'm sure!"

"Ay will it!" ejaculated Michael, fervently.

An hour later all was quiet in the little cabin; the youngest of the family being deprived for the first time of its mother's encircling arms, and the little stranger slumbering in them blissfully. Poor little babe, she was all unconscious that the kind bosom on which she was cradled was the only one in all her motherland in which she had inspired feelings other than a puzzled compassion, and that no single voice except that of this poor peasant woman had been uplifted to bid her welcome home.

CHAPTER III

"DADDY PAT" AND "MAMMIE"

NEXT morning, Father Lalor might have been seen marching down the hilly village street, his cheeks flushed, his white hair rumpled: while he brandished his big stick in a manner which betokened the wildest excitement. He acknowledged the friendly and respectful greetings of his parishioners with unusual brevity, and even brushed past a certain old woman, who sought to detain him with a piteous and minute account of the cramps from which she suffered in her inside, with apparent unfeeling abruptness. He pressed on, indeed, at so brisk a pace, that he was almost breathless when he arrived at last at the Nolans' door, on the threshold of which Mary was anxiously awaiting him.

"Well, Mary," he gasped, bringing himself up with a final flourish of his stick, and pushing back his wide-brimmed hat from his heated brow, "well, Mary, I think we may say victory is ours!"

"Thanks be to God!" cried Mary, and then, uplifting her voice, she called loudly to her husband to come and hear the good news.

"When I say victory, you know," pursued the priest, "I don't mean that we have come off altogether with flying colours. We haven't defeated the enemy all along the line, but as far as the preliminary skirmish goes, I think we may say

we've had the best of it. Mr Fitzgerald," dropping his military metaphor, as he saw the worthy couple looking slightly puzzled—"Mr Fitzgerald has been made to see that the whole country would cry shame on him if he sent his brother's child to the workhouse, so he has consented, after a fashion, to provide for her. That is to say, the child is to be put out to nurse, and he is prepared to pay for her maintenance. I did not leave him until I had made him hand over to me the provision for one year—no more, I must own, than any poor servant could pay for the keep of her child, but still sufficient to maintain her. Now, Mary Nolan—there is no profit to be made of this transaction, I warn you, but I apply to you in the first instance. Will you undertake the charge of this child?"

"Will I, your reverence? Ay, indeed, with a heart and a half! It's no profit I want to make out of it, and so long as there's no loss, nobody need say a word," casting a defiant glance towards Pat, in case he might be disposed to make objections.

"I'll guarantee there shall be no loss," said Father Lalor. "I told Mr Fitzgerald that no further outlay would be required this year for clothes or anything else. We must get her little baggage from the station, and if she comes short of anything between this and then—" pausing and rubbing his nose—"well, you must just apply to me. Next year, as I told Mr Fitzgerald, we must, of course, make fresh arrangements."

He did not add that the kind-hearted gentleman in question had responded with the hope that before next year his niece might be obliging enough to die, and thus relieve him of further responsibility.

It was perhaps curious that the old priest's influence over his very unsatisfactory parishioner should have proved sufficiently strong to induce him to make even such slight concessions; for Fitzgerald, though nominally a Catholic, had long ceased to practise his religion, and had been for many a year a thorn in the good old man's side on account of the bad example he gave his humble brethren. But, cold-hearted and niggardly as was the master of Glenmor, there was yet one point on which, as the priest knew, he was vulnerable; an overweening pride of race—the desire, stronger for being so often baffled, to uphold the honour of his name at all costs and against all comers. It was to this characteristic that was owing his burning resentment towards the revolutionary brother, whose follies had, as he conceived, disgraced the family, and after whose arrest, conviction, and transportation, he had himself withdrawn in fierce indignation and shame from all communion with his fellows. Louis Fitzgerald had grown up with the determination of restoring to wealth and honour a race impoverished by many generations of forefathers as open of heart and free of hand as harum-scarum Gerald, his junior by ten years. He had slaved and hoarded all his life with this object, and everything would have prospered with him had it not been for the misconduct of this rebel brother, who, not content with making their name ridiculous by signing it to his mawkish verses and blood-and-thunder essays, had caused it to become infamous by openly identifying himself with "a set of ruffians and cut-throats." Of what avail, then, were Louis Fitzgerald's efforts to exalt the family banner when Gerald dragged it through the mire, and with what pride could he rule

over the large property, gradually and laboriously won back, when the meanest cottar on the estate knew that a cadet of the house was working out a term of penal servitude? The sentence which had broken the heart of the one brother, wrecked the hopes of the other. He led the life of a Diogenes thenceforth, going nowhere, seeing no one; pinching still, partly because the habit had grown too strong to be easily broken, partly because the solitary joy which remained to him was the triumphant consciousness of his great wealth, the love of money for its own sake. But, nevertheless, the very strongest passion which he possessed was still an indomitable pride; and he was yet keenly susceptible on all subjects which concerned his personal dignity.

Without wasting time, therefore, in appealing to a sense of justice long perverted, or to a heart which did not exist, Father Lalor had at once attacked Fitzgerald on his weak side with so much vigour and insistence that, as has been seen, he ultimately carried his point. A Fitzgerald of Glenmor in the workhouse! Was such a thing ever heard of—could such a disgrace ever be wiped out? And he to send his brother's child there! Why, his name would be a very byword in Ireland, held up to execration by gentle and simple alike. Seeing by Fitzgerald's altering colour that his line of argument was effective, the old priest continued in the same vein, and did not depart until he had extorted from him the reluctant promise already stated, and triumphantly pocketed the pittance necessary for the orphan's "keep" for one year.

So Erin was installed at the Nolans', and grew and throve amazingly, amid Mary's hardy brood. This

gentle foster-mother lavished on her the most tender care, loving her as though she were her own child, and at the same time treating her with the consideration due to her rank as the daughter of Mr Gerald Fitzgerald. The little lady was conscientiously styled "Miss Erin" in the family whose humble abode she shared, and as soon as she was of an age to play with her foster-brothers and sisters, queened it among them right royally. It was only her passionate love for "Mammie," as, in common with the other children, she styled Mary Nolan, that saved the little creature from being spoiled; a grave look on her nurse's kind face, a single admonitory word was sufficient to conquer Miss Erin in her naughtiest moments. One must own, however, that Mary did not often exert her authority; in all minor points her nursling had her way, and everyone in the little household, from Micky the youngest, to "Daddy Pat" himself, succumbed to her influence. As to Father Lalor, he was her abject slave; from the moment when clinging to his big forefinger she had made her first toddling steps, till now when she was old enough to repeat her catechism at his knee, or to go out driving with him in his covered car, his affection for the child had steadily increased. It was his great delight to drive with her to a draper's shop in the neighbouring small town, and there, placing her on the counter, request the attendant to "fit her out with the best of everything." The miserable sums extorted yearly from her uncle for clothes scarcely sufficed to provide her with the barest necessaries, and had not Father Lalor come to the rescue, the orphan's appearance would have in no way differed from that of the little Nolans

themselves. But Father Lalor was not going to have *that*, and so for a year or two Miss Fitzgerald flaunted it in satin hats, and fearful braided pelisses, and patent-leather boots with white stitchings — in fact, with every conceivable monstrosity that an enterprising shopkeeper could palm off on a guileless old man. But, as Erin's sturdy limbs grew stronger and her character developed, she evinced a very decided will of her own, and declined to be hampered with adornments from which her foster-brothers were exempt: no hat would she suffer to rest on her dark curls, no boots or stockings to restrict the freedom of her little brown legs and feet. Barefoot and blissful she pattered along the moss-grown lanes with the other children, and gathered flowers and blackberries, and made mud pies even as they She would go out in the morning while the dew was yet on the grass, her little feet leaving fairy traces as she passed, and never catch cold; she would sit on the doorstep or by the road-side in the full glare of the summer sun till her ruffled head was positively burning to touch, and never seem one bit the worse for it. On the contrary, she grew ever stronger and more lovely, absorbing into her being the sunshine and the free air and the wholesome juices of the earth, and unfolding as a flower-bud, with daily fresh grace and beauty.

So passed five happy years, during which time her uncle never saw the child, never asked a question concerning her, beyond ascertaining the fact that she was still alive. Father Lalor pondered many a time on the advisability of suggesting to the man that his niece was getting too old to be left longer an inmate of this peasant home; that if he refused to admit her under

his own roof, he should make arrangements for some convent school where the little one could be educated as became her birth. But his heart would fail him when he saw the child's attachment to her foster-parents and her complete well-being and contentment.

"She'd fret if she were sent away from us all," he would say, shaking his head. "She'd be sure to fret. She's only a baby still—and she'll learn no harm in Mary Nolan's home. That little woman looks as if she always walked in the presence of God."

This was true: there was never a rough word, never even a coarse expression let fall before her. In spite of her simple and quiet ways, her neighbours had a certain awe of Mrs Nolan, and Pat himself, though he prided himself on being master of his own house, confessed to no small fear of "herself" at sundry times. He was scarcely ever seen the worse for liquor—a fact which was due more to his power of "howldin' out" than to any mawkish inclination to teetotalism; but there *were* occasions when Pat would return from "town" very argumentative in his speech, but slightly unsteady on his legs. Mary was generally prepared for this result when Pat's absence was unusually prolonged, and would receive him more in sorrow than in anger, and conduct him promptly to bed, where she would presently treat him to a lecture of some length and severity, every clause of which her husband endorsed with much fervour.

"'Deed an' ye're right, Mary . . . it *is* too bad, it really is . . . an' us with all these childher. Ay, indeed, an' the Lord knows how many more we'll have yet . . . I *am* ashamed and *con*founded in myself, an' so I ought to be . . . I really don't know how I forgot myself that way at all."

Then Mrs Nolan would emerge with a flushed and solemn face from this inner sanctum, and when the children returned from whatever expedition she had dispatched them on—for she was careful never to allow them to see her husband in this condition—she would inform them that poor "Da" was not at all himself, and that they must be careful not to disturb him.

Nolan was a shoemaker by trade, and, except when cultivating his garden and potato-ground, employed himself all day in a little room to the left of the kitchen—the shop, he called it—where he stitched and whistled merrily hour after hour. In the narrow window stood a magnificent pair of high-heeled lady's boots, ornamented with much fancy stitching and with a pleasing variety in the way of adornment, introduced by a double row of green leather shamrocks which meandered gracefully from toe to ankle; these were supposed by the neighbours to be masterpieces of Pat's, and he did not think it necessary to contradict them, though he had really purchased them at a Dublin sale. Beside them were displayed sundry pairs of stout double-soled heavy-nailed "brogues," which were genuine samples of Nolan's skill. The workshop was a paradise of delight to Erin, though it was dark and stuffy, and the smell of the leather was rather overpowering. To her childish eyes there was a certain mystery about this sanctum which the little ones were only allowed to enter now and then: the rows of tools, the sheets of leather, the bunches of boot-laces, Daddy Pat's wonderful deftness—all excited her interest; and then—those boots in the window, those beautiful, "elegant," shamrock-bedecked boots! Erin thought in her own mind that she would

not object to wearing such lovely things as *those*, and privately resolved that as soon as her feet grew big enough she would ask Father Lalor to buy them for her.

There was one article in the workshop which Erin regarded with calm disdain, but which inspired the little Nolans with no small awe. This was a certain thin and supple strap which hung close by Daddy's bench, and which he was careful, as he severely informed the children, to keep well-greased and always handy.

When one of her little flock proved unusually obstreperous, it was Mary Nolan's custom to march the culprit off to his father; and Pat, rising with much solemnity, would take down the strap from its usual place and flourish it in the air.

"Johnny," he would say, sternly (or "Mickey," or "Billy," as the case might be), "do you know what I keep this for?"

Here he would bring the strap down with a prodigious "whack"—*on the bench.*

Thereupon the small offender would probably hang his head, and squeeze his dirty little knuckles into his eyes.

"I keep it here," Pat would pursue, sinking his voice to a deep and awe-inspiring growl, "for little boys that goes mitching from school, and playin' marbles when they're sent on messages, an' scaldin' their poor mother's heart every way, an', as sure as I'm alive, the next time—the *very next* time—that I catch you at them thricks, my lad, I'll give you a weltin' that ye'll not be the betther of in a hurry."

Then he would frown till his eyes nearly dis-

appeared, shake his head fiercely, bang the bench once more with the strap, and finally hang it up again with a laborious wink at Mary as soon as the sinner's back was turned. Thus was justice satisfied. Needless to say, it was always "next time" that the full penalty was to be inflicted, for, as good-natured little Daddy often remarked in confidence to his cronies, he "wouldn't lay a finger on one o' them" to save his life; nevertheless, as the little pickles were never quite sure that he was not really going to keep his word at last, and that the castigation would not be all the more severe for being so long delayed, the effect was almost as good as if he had actually carried out his threat.

Indeed, it is only fair to say that there was no need for much strictness in that family. The children were bright-eyed, active little things, wild as young goats, free and unsophisticated as the birds, and hardly less innocent. Mary taught them their prayers and catechism, and instinctively they imbibed her faith, her love of God, as formerly they had drawn the milk from her kindly bosom. The little orphan had shared this motherly nurture of soul as well as of body; but her mind being of a more inquiring turn than that of the others, she often puzzled her simple instructress by strange questions and comments.

On one occasion she insisted that she understood "all about" the Blessed Trinity, and that this, the most impenetrable of all mysteries, was no mystery to her.

"But, my pet," urged poor Mary diffidently, "ye can't say that. No one ever understood it yet, nor ever will."

"Well, *I* understand," returned the small sage with a defiant stamp of her foot—"I understand quite *well.* Not t'ree Gods—o' course not! T'ree persons in one God. I understand, I tell ye—only," she added, after a moment's reflection, "I think it must make God very fat!"

"After that!" as Mary said in deep consternation, there was clearly nothing for it but to refer the matter to Father Lalor.

CHAPTER IV

UNCLE AND NIECE

ONE autumn day it chanced that Mr Fitzgerald was returning from inspecting some outlying farms of his, whither he had driven early in the morning, and, remembering that by dismissing his car-driver at the village he could save a shilling or two, he prepared to go home on foot. As he pursued his way rather slowly, looking neither to right nor to left, and turning over certain calculations in his mind, he came suddenly on a party of children playing on the mossy bank which bordered one side of the road. He paused as he caught sight of the little girl who formed the central figure of the group, and the singularity of whose dress would have struck him even had not one glance at her face assured him of her identity. He knew that face well though he never before gazed on it; he recognised every feature, every curve, though necessarily much softer in this infantile face than in that other, long unseen, but constantly in his thoughts; the very eyes, though different in colour, were like in their brilliancy, their expression, half sad, half scornful—why, every gesture of this five-year old imp, the turn of the head, the momentary knitting of the delicate brows, the curl of the short lip, recalled Gerald—Gerald, as he had looked on him for the last time. Erin was seated on a big lichen-covered stone, her slender brown legs

crossed under the skirt of her short frock, which scarcely covered her knees. This frock, a purchase of Father Lalor's, was of crimson velveteen, profusely trimmed with gold braid, and, however unsuitable in fashion and material, was singularly becoming to the child. The colour, of a soft shade of maroon, contrasted with the mass of dusky curls, and set off the delicate tints of her complexion beneath, in which clear golden tones of sunburn overlay the natural pink and white; and the antiquated shape of the garment, with its low bodice and short puffed sleeves, revealed the exquisite contour of the dimpled neck and shoulders, and gave free play to the well-knit graceful limbs. A crown of scarlet wild cherry leaves and ash-berries had been placed by some of her playmates in her dark locks, and in one hand she held a peeled hazel-wand, surmounted by a bunch of the same. It was a wild, brilliant, barbaric, little figure altogether, startingly out of place on this Irish wayside, amid these chubby-cheeked, shabbily-clothed peasant children, and yet so quaint and beautiful a vision that anyone but Fitzgerald would have been struck with admiration. But rage and a kind of shame filled this man's heart as he gazed at the fantastic array of his niece; noting with scorn the contrast between the velvet frock and the bare sunburnt limbs, the grace and baby-dignity of the attitude, and the shock heads and ragged garments of her obsequious followers. A further contrast was perceptible when she spoke presently, in clear tones, well modulated and refined, but with a most unmistakable brogue.

"I 'll take my supper here—tell Bridget to bring it to me, one o' yez, and now"—with a grand-

iloquent wave of her small hand—"yez can all go away."

No tragedy-queen could have announced that she "would be alone!" with a more magnificent air. Miss Erin's courtiers retired immediately, and her small majesty was left face to face with her unknown uncle, who now advanced close to her. If he expected the child to be frightened or impressed by his sudden arrival and stern and forbidding air, he was mistaken. Erin sat calmly waving her scarlet-capped wand, and gazing at him with curiosity strongly dashed with disapproval.

"Where do you live?" he asked, harshly, at length. He would not ask her name.

"Beyant there, with Daddy Pat an' Mammie," returned the child, pointing with her stick to the roof of the Nolans' cabin, visible amid some trees at a little distance.

"What do you call them?" he cried, flushing and frowning.

"Daddy Pat an' Mammie," repeated Erin laconically.

"Your father is dead, child!" exclaimed Fitzgerald harshly.

"I know that; an' so's my blessed mother—the Lord have mercy on their sowls!"—here the little creature joined her hands as Mary had taught her. "That's why I live with Daddy Pat an' Mammie," she pursued with placid insistence, heedless that each repetition of the obnoxious titles irritated Fitzgerald further.

"We'll see about that," he cried. "Do you know who I am? No?"—as she shook her head—"Well, —I am your uncle. Did you ever hear of your uncle?"

"Ay."

"You did? Come"—with a savage laugh—"let us hear what they say of me."

"Mammie bid me never forget to pray for ye," said the child, colouring with instinctive resentment of his tone.

Fitzgerald was disconcerted for a moment by this unexpected reply, yet his wrath, instead of diminishing, increased. Pray for him, indeed!—it was like their impertinence!

"I will release you from that duty," he cried. "You needn't pray for me any more—do you hear? I don't want your prayers."

"I 'm very glad," returned Erin with flashing eyes. "I don't want to pray for you—I don't want *you*! I wish you 'd go 'way!" and with a sudden outburst of wrath, she aimed a blow at him with her stick, sliding down from her rocky seat immediately afterwards, and fleeing homewards with the speed of a deer.

Her uncle followed at a more leisurely pace, brimming over with resentment; too ungenerous to take the child's age into consideration, or to remember that if she was dressed like a little mountebank and spoke like a peasant, he had only his own niggardliness and negligence to thank for it.

"I 'll put a stop to this," he muttered to himself. "I 'll not be publicly disgraced by the brat, anyhow. I must take her away—take her home. Martha will see that she doesn't get in my way. It won't make much difference to me, and will perhaps be cheaper in the long run, than paying sums to that canting cheat, Mrs Nolan."

This last consideration somewhat soothed him,

but the voice with which he presently summoned forth poor Mary was still of the harshest, as also was the manner in which he upbraided her for making "a figure of fun" of the child, and for suffering her to run about the roads barefoot, with her own rascally cubs, playing with them on equal terms, and speaking with their villainous brogue. Mary, flushed and tearful, defended herself as well as she could. The velvet frock was last year's gift from Father Lalor, and having now become too short for the child, she was wearing it out every day. For the rest, she had done the best she could. They were but poor people with common ways, and the darlin' child couldn't help but imitate what she saw and heard,—as for keepin' her from runnin' about, God bless her! it wasn't Mary who would have the heart to do that. Of course, her poor little children were no fit companions for her —she knew that well—but she tried to make them kind and respectful to her always, and she would say that, whatever they were, Miss Erin could never get any harm from them, poor little things! It wasn't in a child's nature to keep from playin' when other children were about her, and Mary could not help it.

"She calls you 'Mammie,' I believe, and your husband 'Daddy,'" snarled Fitzgerald. "Come— you could help that, I suppose."

Mary cast down her eyes in confusion, and began to pleat her apron nervously.

"She picked it up from the other little ones, sir, an'—an' I hadn't the heart to correct her for it— poor darlin' orphan that never had a real mother to love her. Someway, I used to be thinkin' that

if her poor mamma could know, she'd maybe like to think someone had a mother's heart for her child —indeed, the Lord knows, I couldn't love her better if she was one o' my own! And—" still more diffidently—"it's 'Daddy Pat' she calls himself. I tried to break her of it, for, of course, there was a deal of difference between Mr Gerald—God be merciful to him!—an' the poor wife, an' it didn't seem such a liberty for the child to be callin' me Mammie, as it is to be givin' Mr Gerald's name to the likes o' Pat. But the most I could get her to do was to call him Daddy Pat. True, she is but a child, an' knows no better, sir," she added apologetically, "she'll get more sense as she grows older."

"It is high time now for her to begin to learn how to behave," returned Fitzgerald. "A more ill-brought-up imp it would be hard to find. I am ashamed to own her for my niece."

"Indeed, sir, that's nothing new," returned Mary, with some spirit. "I don't think you ever took much pride in her."

"I'll take care that in future she doesn't disgrace me, if it's any satisfaction to you to know that," said Fitzgerald grimly. "I'll send my housekeeper to fetch her to-morrow morning, so you'd better get her trumpery things together. If I had known how you were bringing her up, I should have sent for her before."

"To-morrow," repeated Mary with a sort of cry; too much grieved at the thought of losing the child to resent the unjust reproach. "Ye're—ye're not goin' to take her away from us altogether *to-morrow*."

Fitzgerald reddened with anger and humiliation.

"Do you think the child belongs to you?" he cried hotly; "you forget yourself, Mrs Nolan. Take her away from you! Remember, if you please, that you were her nurse, and nothing more. It suited my convenience to leave her with you up to this, and now it suits me to take her away—what does it matter to you? You have nothing to say to her?"

For all answer, Mary flung her apron over her head and sobbed behind it, and Fitzgerald, after a moment's pause, turned on his heel and left the cabin. When the good woman's grief had partly spent itself she drew down her apron slowly, and started as she saw Erin's little figure standing, framed in sunlight, on the threshold.

"Mammie!" she said, advancing doubtfully, her eyes filling, and her mouth quivering in sympathy, as she gazed at her nurse's face.

"My heart's treasure!" cried poor Mammie, bursting into fresh tears.

Erin uttered an answering wail and rushed across the room, flinging herself into Mary's arms, and sobbing until the poor woman was almost terrified at the violence of her grief.

"Whisht, whisht, alanna! aisy now—sure it's—it's nothin' to cry for. I—I dunno what came over me at all."

"It's that bad man!" cried Erin. "He made you cry—I know he did," and she sobbed afresh—it was such a wonderful, heart-breaking, terrifying experience to see Mammie cry. But presently, she disengaged herself, and lifted a small, tear-stained face, white and fixed in its anger. "He's a wicked, ugly, owld fellow," she exclaimed, "I hate him."

"O darlin', ye mustn't say that. God wouldn't let ye hate anyone. An' he's your uncle, dear—your poor papa's brother, ye know."

"Well, I hate him all the same—I do—an' I'll kill him if he makes you cry again." She set her little teeth, and clenched her hand, and stamped her baby foot on the earthen floor — and then, suddenly melting, flung her arms round Mary's neck again. "I won't say it if you don't like, Mammie," she wailed, "but I'll have to kill him if he isn't good to you!"

"Save us and bless us!" murmured poor Mary, "what'll I do at all?"

Great was Daddy's consternation when Mary, having induced Erin to join her playmates out-of-doors, imparted the sad news to him.

"Sure it's lost we'll be without her!" he groaned; "lost intirely! 'Pon me word, Mary, I'd as soon it was wan of our own—sooner—I would so. God help the poor darlin'. What sort of a life will she have in it at all? It's well, if he hasn't her destroyed on us before the year's out."

At this dismal prospect Mrs Nolan wept afresh, and Pat himself was constrained to wipe his eyes with his shirt sleeve. During the evening he uttered sundry smothered lamentations whenever he looked at the child. Mary had begged of him not to "let on" to her about the impending separation, as otherwise she knew little Erin would not "close an eye" all night; so poor Daddy restrained his feelings as well as he could, contenting himself with the inarticulate groans afore described, shaking his head and lugubriously growling, "No mather!" When the children asked him what ailed him, Erin's little face

wore an anxious expression as she looked from one to the other of her foster-parents. There was some painful mystery connected no doubt with the visit of her "wicked" uncle, which she resented fiercely, but about which she forbore to inquire, partly because of a curious childish reserve which was one of her characteristics, and partly because she had a dim dread of being enlightened.

When the time came for her to say her night prayers at Mary's knees, she paused, after having repeated her usual little formula: "God grant the light of heaven to my papa and mamma. Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let the perpetual light shine on them. May they rest in peace. Amen."

"God bless my uncle," prompted Mary, tremulously.

Erin squatted back on her little bare heels.

"I 'm never goin' to pray for him no more."

"Oh, my jewel, you mustn't say that. That 'ud be wrong entirely. Why wouldn't ye pray for him?"

"He bid me not himself to-day," observed Erin, shaking back her curls defiantly.

"God forgive him!" ejaculated Mrs Nolan, in mingled horror and anguish — "But maybe"—endeavouring to recover herself, "maybe he was—only joking. Ye 'll pray for him, darlin', when Mammie bids ye, won't ye?"

Erin gazed solemnly up at the kind troubled face, and presently knelt upright, and clasped her hands once more.

"God bless my uncle," resumed Mary, in her most devout tone.

"God bless my uncle," echoed the clear, childish treble, and then, after a short pause, Erin added slowly and fervently, "and send him to hell soon."

CHAPTER V

TRANSPLANTED

AFTER this indication of her nursling's feelings, Mary's dismay at the approaching change increased.

"Sure the tellin' her itself 'ud be as much as my life 's worth, let alone the makin' her go, an' yet she 'll have to be told to-morrow mornin' before the strange woman comes. D 'ye think ye could tell her, Pat, in a kind of a laughing way, ye know—I—I couldn't keep from the cryin' if I went to go to do it myself."

"Laugh, indeed," whimpered Pat, "there 's not much laugh left in me. I 'd make a poor hand of it altogether, so I would. Ye had a right to go to Father Lalor, anyway—an' see what he says. Sure maybe he might be able to put a stop to it altogether. Bedad, we ought to have thought of that before."

Mrs Nolan revived somewhat at this suggestion, and donning her bonnet and shawl forthwith, set off through the dusk for the priest's house.

But she returned in no very cheerful mood. Father Lalor was of opinion that if Fitzgerald wished to take his niece away, it would be useless to oppose him, and that therefore they would do well to prepare her on the morrow, and he would himself drive her to Glenmor in his covered car. He would "keep an eye" on Mr Fitzgerald, he had added, and would take care that the little one was not ill-used.

When the good old priest called on the following morning, however, he found that Mary had not yet had the courage to break the tidings to the child.

"Sure I hadn't the heart, Father," she explained in a whisper. "She wouldn't stir a foot from me the whole day, an' she 'd look at me so pitiful every time I 'd go to begin, that I raly couldn't say a word. But she has been watchin' me gettin' her little bits o' things together, an' she let me put on her boots an' stockin's, an' never a sound out of her—her that ye 'd hear shouting above at the Glen every time I try to get a shoe on her—so I think she suspects, your reverence."

"Well, well," grunted the old priest, "take her out to the car. We must be off, or that woman Martha will be here on top of us. I 'll have to tell her, poor little thing, myself, as we go along."

"Now, my beauty," began poor Mary, turning to the child, who was clinging to her skirts, "here 's Father Lalor goin' to take you for a lovely drive—himself an' you. Ye 're in great luck." A big sob almost choked this mendacious statement, but she swallowed it down bravely. "'Tisn't Patsy that 'ud be gettin' a drive in Father Lalor's car, nor Maggie, nor even Bridget, as big as she is——"

By this time they had reached the vehicle, Erin trotting beside Mrs Nolan in silence, but staring at her hard; her small bundle of belongings was handed in, and Father Lalor, already seated, held out his arms for herself. Mary stooped to detach the little clinging hands, and as she did so the tears gushed from her eyes. Erin with a startled look loosed her hold, and suffered herself to be lifted into the car, but when she was installed on Father Lalor's

knee, and the door closed, she suddenly stretched out her arms with a piercing cry.

"Mammie!"

"Drive on for God's sake!" exclaimed the priest in great perturbation. There was something so unchildlike in the anguish of that cry, in the expression of the small white face, with its panic-stricken eyes, that he was almost frightened.

Mary turned and fled into the house, where Pat and the children awaited her, having received strict orders not to let Erin see them crying, and not daring in consequence to accompany her to the gate.

When the car turned the corner of the road, and the cottage was no longer in sight, Father Lalor cleared his throat.

"My pet," he said, "I want to tell you something."

Erin looked him full in the face.

"I know where ye're takin' me to," she returned. "That bad man bid ye fetch me to his ugly owld house."

The priest, greatly disconcerted, and partly relieved, entered into a laborious explanation; finding the difficulty of inducing Erin to take a hopeful view of the matter increased by his absolute inability to feel hopeful himself. The child was still unconvinced when they arrived at Glenmor, where the door was opened by Martha, bonneted and cloaked, and looking particularly sour.

"You've brought the child, I see," she observed, as Father Lalor lifted her out. "I was just going to fetch her. Are those her things? Now then, come along, my dear."

She spoke sharply, and yet had the priest been

less preoccupied he would have noticed that her expression changed as she caught sight of the little face under the quilted satin bonnet.

"Kindly inform your master that I wish to see him," said Erin's protector, holding the child's trembling hand fast.

The woman hesitated a moment, and then said, more gently than she had hitherto spoken:

"I wouldn't if I was you, sir. It 'll be a deal better for her if you don't make no fuss about her. Just leave her quietly with me in the kitchen, and let the master notice her when he has a mind to."

"Indeed, I 'll do nothing of the sort," cried Father Lalor indignantly. "Remember this child is the daughter of your master's brother, and entitled to be treated with proper respect and consideration. If Mary Nolan's house is not the proper place for her, and," with a hasty wave of his hand, "I must own it certainly is not—it certainly is not, neither is your kitchen. Let me pass—I will see your master."

Martha smiled grimly.

"I 'm sure it 's no pleasure to me to have a child messin' about my kitchen. It was but for her good I spoke. Do as you please, sir. This way to the study."

Erin gave a scared look round as they entered the dilapidated room, and clung closer to Father Lalor. Her uncle glanced over his shoulder without rising.

"You 've brought the child, have you?" he observed; then, raising his voice, "Martha! take her away."

"Yes," said the old priest, without noticing the latter part of this speech, while Martha, on her part, stood absolutely still, "I have brought your niece to her rightful home, Mr Fitzgerald. You are now

entirely responsible for her education—you will have to account to God, and the world," he added, emphatically, "for the manner in which you treat this child. In the eyes of God and man you stand in her father's place."

"Pish!" returned Fitzgerald, shrugging his shoulders. "Take her away, Martha; do you hear? Now, sir, you understand all transactions between us are at an end. You go your way, and I go mine. Martha, I shall not be at home in future when this gentleman calls."

"Why, then, Martha, my good woman," cried Father Lalor, turning round with a very red face, "you may spare yourself the trouble of telling me a lie at any time, for I may as well say to you plainly, that whenever I think well of coming here, I 'll just walk in, and if you try to stop me, it wouldn't be much trouble to me to take you by the shoulders and move you civilly out of my way, so now!"

The sturdy old priest was thoroughly roused, and looked quite capable of carrying out his threat.

He moved forward one of the crazy chairs now, and after cautiously testing it to see if it would sustain his weight, sat down, and drew Erin between his knees.

"Mr Fitzgerald," he resumed, "I have one or two little things to say to you, and, upon my word, I think it would be as well for you to turn round and listen to me decently. It would save you a crick in the neck maybe," he added quaintly.

"If you think I 'm going to be bullied," growled Fitzgerald, jerking round his chair, however, and turning his lowering face towards his visitor.

"No, no, sir, you 'll get no bullying from me,"

interrupted Father Lalor. "I just want to explain the matter to you and then I will take my departure. Now, here is this child—alive and well, thank God—that's one fact. She's your niece, Miss Fitzgerald of Glenmor—that's another. If she is to go on living, and thriving as she should, she will require good food and good clothes, and proper care, sir; and if she is to be brought up as befits her future station in life, she must have a good education. And now," said the old man, raising his voice as Fitzgerald endeavoured to interrupt him, and lifting his finger with the gesture he usually employed when he reached a particularly impressive part of his sermon, "now I'm coming to my third point. This is the most important of all. The child is a Catholic, sir, and entitled by the law of the land to be brought up in her father's faith. You, I regret to say, have long ceased to practise your religion, and your housekeeper is a Protestant. To come to a practical conclusion, therefore," again uplifting his forefinger, and quoting a phrase familiar to his congregation, "let me ask you what school you intend to send the child to? She should be sent to school. Indeed, Mr Fitzgerald, you would find it the easiest and simplest plan to send her at once to a convent school, where she would be well looked after. It would free you from all trouble and responsibility, you know," he added persuasively, looking over his spectacles with anxious pleading eyes, and patting the child's shoulder with his big gentle hand.

Fitzgerald rose from his chair.

"It is exceedingly kind of you to concern yourself so much with my affairs," he remarked. "When I require your advice about my niece's education I

shall consult you. Meanwhile, perhaps you will have the kindness to take yourself off. As you were good enough to point out just now, I stand in her father's place—therefore, I take it, no one has a right to interfere with me."

"Oh shame, sir! shame!" cried Father Lalor warmly. "Do you dare to twist my words to suit your cruel purpose? The poor orphan does not belong to you altogether though, her soul is my affair, sir, I'd have ye to know. Humanly speaking, I may say I'm the agent for that bit of the Lord's property, and I mean to look after it. There's justice to be had, sir," looking very fierce and clapping his hat firmly on his head, "and if you don't do your duty by that child we'll argue the matter out in a Court of Law, and maybe more would come out about yourself and your doings than you'd quite fancy."

He had risen from his chair and approached the door, accompanied by Fitzgerald, whose face had turned white with anger, and who now, with a sudden swift movement, pushed the old man and his charge into the passage.

"Take care," shouted Father Lalor, as the door was violently slammed behind them, "you've not seen the last of me yet. No, nor heard the end of this. God forgive me!" he added to himself, as he walked slowly towards the house door, "God forgive me for the terrible passion I'm after getting into. But when the wolf has the lamb in his clutches, it's hard for the shepherd to keep cool."

He had now reached the open air, and turned to face Martha who had followed him.

"Well," he said, "I must give her up to you, I

suppose. Good-bye, Erin, good-bye, my pet. I 'll be calling to see you in a day or two. Don't cry—don't cry, there 's a good child. See now, let Father Lalor go, the poor horse you know is getting cold, and the man is tired waiting. That 's it," gently loosing her terrified grip. "Be a good child and say your prayers, and remember the Holy Mother is your mother too. God bless you, don't cry." Big tears were running down his own cheeks as he mopped up Erin's with his red cotton handkerchief; the child was crying bitterly, and desperately endeavouring to free her little hands that she might again clutch his coat.

"Oh, woman, woman!" groaned the priest, wrenching himself away at last, and peering anxiously through his dim spectacles at Martha. "If you have a heart in your breast, be good to this poor little child!"

Martha, who had been making curious facial contortions during this little scene, nodded, without speaking; and stooping suddenly, caught up Erin in her arms and ran with her down the steps and into the fir-wood.

Erin shrieked loudly for Father Lalor, and fought with her hands and feet, but to no avail; Martha's grasp was strong, and she did not relax it until the wheels of the covered car sounded faint in the distance.

"Now look ye, my lamb," she said, setting the child on her feet, "the priest 's gone away, and all the crying in the world won't bring him back. If your uncle hears ye makin' that noise he 'll be angry, that 's why I 've brought ye out here; we 'll have to stop here till ye 've done cryin'."

Erin's woe proving too great, however, to be checked all at once, her new friend considerately sat down on the grassy bank to wait till the paroxysm subsided, and Erin sobbed and rolled about on the ground and shrieked alternately for Mammie, and Daddy Pat, and Father Lalor, until at last from sheer exhaustion she was obliged to be still. Martha, who had been hugging her lean knees in an abstracted manner, now stretched out her hands.

"Come here, lovey," she said.

Erin rose slowly and approached, her chest still heaving, her eyes swollen, her face the very picture of woe. Something in the little desolate figure touched Martha's heart in spite of her forbidding aspect. Martha *had* a heart, and certain long forgotten womanly emotions began to assert themselves.

"Come, lovey," she said again, and unfastening the child's bonnet, she began to stroke her hair. "Eh, what curls! and quite wet with tears! And your little face—deary me! Sit ye down a bit on Martha's knee, and don't ye cry no more." She stooped with a suddenly curious peck at the child's cheek. "You and me will be the best o' friends, same as me an' your pa was."

"Did you know my papa?" asked Erin, forgetting her grief in her interest.

"Ah! that I did, and you're the very picture of him, Missie. Didn't I cook his breakfast for him the very mornin' he was took?"

"Took—who took him?"

"Oh, well, I'll tell you some day, may be. But wait till you hear about the beautiful horse he had. It was bay colour with black mane and tail, and it used to go galloping, galloping, galloping."

Now Martha simulated the action of a galloping horse with her bony knees. A smile broke slowly over Erin's face. "Galloping, galloping, galloping!" cried Martha, in ecstacies at the success of her manœuvre, and jerking the child up and down so vigorously that she almost tumbled off her lap.

"Again!" cried Erin, clapping her hands, and laughing outright.

A high game of romps ensued, Martha making up for some slowness and awkwardness by exceeding earnestness and good-will. Her face, meanwhile, was a study.

It was long since she had held a child in her arms —not since her little sister died, so many years ago. All sorts of queer old memories were stirring within her now, and a kind of wondering and reluctant joy. But an hour ago she had most unwillingly prepared to receive this little visitor; *she* didn't want no children bothering about the house, she had told her master, and now the baby laughter was good to hear, the touch of the clinging arms was strange and sweet, it was pleasant to see the little face dimple into smiles.

"After all," quoth Martha, "it does put a bit o' life in the house to have a child about, too."

CHAPTER VI

OLIVER CROMWELL

ERIN made quite a triumphant entry into her Uncle's gloomy mansion, riding on Martha's back and "spurring" her with sturdy little heels. But she grew thoughtful when her rampant steed deposited her in a chair, desiring her to sit quiet while dinner was being prepared.

The kitchen was dark and close, and Martha's movements uninteresting; gradually the colour faded away from the child's face, and the wistful look came back to her eyes.

"Woman," she said presently, using a term which Patrick Nolan frequently applied to his wife, "this is a very ugly room. Will I be livin' here?"

Martha put down the pot she had been cleaning and glanced at her.

"No, child, this is no place for you. You'll—well, well, we'll see."

When the time came for Mr Fitzgerald's meagre meal to be served, he was surprised to find that Martha had prepared two places at the table.

"What's this?" he asked sharply.

"I've laid for Miss Fitzgerald, sir. The kitchen's no place for her. And, besides, I never engaged to be nurse, sir."

Her master looked at her frowning, but Martha looked back stolid and determined.

"The child don't have her meals in the kitchen so long as I'm there, sir. Now, Missy, come!"

Erin came slowly from the passage, giving one fierce glance at her uncle as she entered, and then climbing on to her chair. Martha cut up her dinner, claiming "another slice" peremptorily, as Fitzgerald ungraciously doled out a portion. Presently she retired, returning with a custard in a little cup.

"Eat this, lovey. 'Tis nicer than that hard cold meat."

"Come, I think that's unnecessary," cried Fitzgerald. "I won't have the brat pampered, Martha do you hear? No more useless extravagance, if you please, in future."

"The child must have good food, sir!" retorted Martha. "I'm not going to stand by and see her starved."

Little Erin gazed at the pair in astonishment, as they wrangled together. Finally, Martha, still snapping at her master, knelt down beside her little charge and held a spoonful of the custard to her lips.

"Eat it up, deary," she said. "I'll see that you get what ye like."

But Erin pushed away the spoon, and set her proud little lips close. She was insulted, wounded to the heart's core. Her uncle "grudged" her the custard —she who had always been served with the choicest morsels of the Nolans' fare; who was accustomed to see her foster-brethren vying with each other in their anxiety to supply her with the very best that was to be had. The mealiest potato, the freshest egg, the crustiest "heel" of the cottage loaf—it was quite a matter of course that these should be reserved for "Miss Erin," and now "the woman" had made her a

custard, and that frowning unkind man opposite did not want her to have it. She slid down from her chair and ran out of the room, Martha remaining behind to treat her master to a bit of her mind. Her long service and economical habits had given her a certain influence over him, and he listened shamefacedly if unwillingly enough to her harangue. She left the room at last, throwing out dark hints of "giving notice" if the dear child didn't have her rights, and went in search of her; but Erin was nowhere to be found. Her shoes and stockings, indeed, were to be seen upon the kitchen floor, and her bonnet hung upon the nail behind the door, but there was no further sign of the little creature anywhere.

Martha hunted all over the house and garden, and finally, baffled and anxious, returned to her master.

"Now I hope you're satisfied, sir. The child's run away."

"Nonsense! She's in hiding somewhere."

"She isn't, for I've turned the whole place upside down. I believe she's gone back to those folks yonder. She'll get a bit to eat there, anyhow."

Fitzgerald started up with an oath: he could hardly believe a baby of Erin's age could have the strength or the spirit to run two miles of an unfamiliar road, but yet it seemed clear that she must have made the attempt. If she had really returned to the Nolans, what a story would be made out of it, and if, on the other hand, she were lost, what a hue-and-cry there would be!

"Go and see if she's there, then," he growled; "and if she's not——"

"If she's not, what am I to do, sir?"

"Go, you fool! Go!" shouted Fitzgerald, beside

himself with anger and alarm. "You take one road, and I 'll take the other. She can't be very far."

But Erin had got a good start of them, and her little feet, divested of what she took to be ignominious badges of servitude, had flown rapidly along the grassy edge of the road. When Martha entered the Nolans' cottage, she found her seated in the midst of an adoring family group, relating her grievances and regaling herself with potatoes and milk.

Had Erin been an experienced diplomatist, instead of a child of six, she could not have played her cards better. In his anxiety to prevent a repetition of this expedient of hers, which could not fail, as he knew, to give rise in the neighbourhood to much scandalous gossip concerning himself, Fitzgerald forthwith permitted Martha to treat the child as she would, and this saving element of tenderness in her life, rough and awkward though it might be, hindered the little one's proud and sensitive nature from being warped amid its new surroundings.

It was not very much, indeed, that poor Martha could do. She gave the child good food, and kept her clothes neat and clean. She insisted on her meals being partaken of at her uncle's table, and escorted her little charge to mass and catechism on Sundays, endeavouring also, in desultory fashion, to teach her to read and write. But Erin, in spite of her efforts, ran wild for the most part, and, as time went on, became more and more insubordinate.

Not all Martha's adoration could atone for the loss of Mammie Nolan's motherly care; and it was characteristic of the child that though she tolerated, and even after a fashion liked, her new acquaintance, she was always a little distant with her.

Martha was a servant—Mary Nolan was Mammie; that made all the difference. Many a time, disregarding the housekeeper's anxious entreaties, did Erin make her way to her foster-parents' cottage; it was still home to her, and her strongest affections were given to Mary and Daddy Pat. Martha, finding it vain to gainsay her, was weak enough to connive at these periodical escapes, and to keep the knowledge of them from her master; and the Nolans in consequence enjoyed a good deal of their darling's company, secretly, in the kitchen, or in Daddy Pat's shop. Squatting in the familiar dark corner, among the strips of leather, Erin listened eagerly to Pat's discussions of the "state of the politics" with his cronies. Those were stirring times, and the cronies had been dropping in often of late—too often, Mary thought. Occasionally she would interrupt an impassioned speech of her husband's with the dry reminder that Thady M'Evoy 'ud be apt to be callin' soon for his brogues; or would give the visitor a broad hint or two that his presence was retarding Pat at his work.

"He has a good deal to make up this year, too," she observed one day. "You're a bit behind altogether, ye know, Pat, and we were in arrears last rent-day too."

"Ha, maybe we'd never be asked to pay it, though!" cried Pat. "There's new times comin', woman, when Erin shall dry her tears, and the tyrant's opaque star shall be quinched for ever in the glorious sunburst of Irish liberty."

"Hear, hear, Pat! More power to ye!" cried the friend admiringly.

"Ah, Pat, ye have me moithered with them bits out of the papers," said poor Mary, much exasper-

ated. "It 'ud serve your turn better if you 'd leave them for them that has nothin' better to do nor to be gossipin' here and there—an' mind your work. Us with ten little mouths to feed, an' no one to look to but yourself."

"Sure, a man can work an' talk too," grumbled Pat, plying his awl with a little more energy, and endeavouring to recall another quotation from one of his favourite prints, with which, when he "had it right," he meant to astonish his hearers.

Nevertheless, Pat's oratorical efforts did rather interfere with his legitimate labours, and sometimes when Erin poked her sunny head over the half-door she found Mammie sitting alone with her apron over her face, and was informed that Daddy Pat had gone out—on business. A general election was at hand, and Home Rule was discussed hotly and enthusiastically. All sorts of vague rumours and wild hopes were floating in the air. Daddy, and others of his kind, bought a great many little green-covered papers and pamphlets, out of which they quoted resounding sentences.

One day Erin, from her corner, was privy to a discussion between Daddy Pat and a customer of his—a very old man, who had once been coachman to some of "the quality" in the neighbourhood, and who, in consequence of his settled aristocratic principles, had failed to be carried away by the tide of popular feeling.

"Ye may say what ye like, Pat Nolan," he observed, "it 'll be a bad day for Ireland when them layguers gets to the fore. Sure, what are they but a rigiment o' rogues? That 's all they are in the world! Thrampin' the counthry to see how

many omadhawns they can take in. I 'll throuble ye for them boots, if ye plaze."

Pat, without stooping to notice this last request, launched forth into one of his customary harangues, the opaque star being once more "quinched," and many other favourite metaphors brought forth for the occasion; but his adversary remained unmoved.

"What good have they done yez—that's what I want to know. Is there e'er a wan o' them that's done ye a ha'porth o' good? Stravaguin' the counthry up and down, an' turnin' the heads o' decent honest boys like yourself, Pat. Look at the time you've kept me waiting for them boots—you that, before ye took up with them politics, 'ud have clapped a patch on them before I could turn round; an' that's the way wid the whole o' yez. The counthry's gone mad an' done for— I tell ye what it is, Pat, the only thing for Ireland now 'ud be to go to hell for Oliver Cromwell; he'd be the boy that 'ud settle yez."

"Ah, g' long out o' that, ye ould renegade!" cried Pat indignantly. "Ye're no betther nor an Orangeman! I wouldn't demean myself with talkin' to ye at all, so be off home, an' take your ould Protestant boots along wid ye! Sorra patch I 'll put on them. Sure, it's nayther Irishman nor Catholic ye are to be talkin' that way. Oliver Cromwell, indeed!"

"Ah, he'd be the lad for yez," repeated the old man, chuckling as he picked up the boots which had been flung contemptuously towards him. "Oliver 'ud soon shut yer mouths for yez!"

"Ye had a right to go fetch him yerself then," shouted Pat defiantly after him. "On'y maybe they wouldn't let ye up again in a hurry. They 'll be apt to be expectin' ye down below this long while."

"Daddy Pat," said Erin suddenly, standing up in her corner, "who is Oliver Cromwell?"

"Bless us and save us! I forgot ye were there, darlint. Ah, don't be mindin' all the talk ye hear out of us, my pet; sure we do be goin' on a quare way sometimes."

"Is Oliver Cromwell in hell?" asked the child, seriously.

"God love her! Listen to her," returned Pat, apostrophising the air. "Faith he is, alanna! But don't be thinkin o' those things."

"What did he do?" persisted Erin.

"Ah, he was a terrible fellow, out and out! I couldn't tell ye what he didn't do. But run off to Mammie, darlin'; she was here lookin' for ye a while ago."

Erin went into the adjoining room, assailing Mary with a similar question, and being put off with the announcement that *she* was only an ignorant woman, and couldn't be tellin' her the like of that. Erin turned home, puzzled and exasperated. Who was Oliver Cromwell, and why was he the only man for Ireland now? What were the terrible things he had done, and why was it necessary to go to hell to look for him? Erin knew a good deal about hell, taking an immense interest in the part of her catechism which was concerned with it—for the weird and the terrible had a fascination for her. She had heard that bad people went there, but it had never occurred to her that bad people could come out again. This was quite a new idea, and rather an uncomfortable one; it behoved her all the more to know something about this gentleman who might be coming, it seemed, any day to "settle" Ireland. She ran home faster than usual, looking rather uneasily to right and left, for she

fancied that Oliver Cromwell might possibly be looking at her over the hedges.

She asked Martha about him as soon as she got home, and Martha thought he was a king who had cut off somebody's head. She didn't know *whose* head, and though she was of opinion that it was a long time ago, she didn't know *how* long. It was all very vague and unsatisfactory; Erin was more tantalised than ever. At tea-time, however, a bright thought struck her. Her uncle was very learned and very clever; he was a bad man, too—it was very possible that Oliver was a crony of his—she would ask him.

Mr Fitzgerald was accordingly much astonished when, the meal being half over, his niece suddenly addressed him.

"Uncle Fitzgerald, who is Oliver Cromwell?"

He laid down his knife and fork and looked at her.

"What did you say, child?"

Erin slid off her chair, and, standing beside him, repeated her question.

"Look in your history book," he said, with a laugh.

"Sure, I can't read yet," cried Erin, her little face falling.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, then. Why doesn't Martha teach you?"

"Martha learns me A B C," explained the child. "It's stupid! It means nothing. I didn't know it said about Oliver Cromwell and them things in books. Martha doesn't learn me right. Why mayn't I go to school beyant, the same as Nanny Nolan?"

"Why mayn't you go to the National School?" repeated Fitzgerald, angry, but startled at the direct question. "Because I don't choose that you should

go to the same school with all the beggars' brats in the country."

He waved his hand impatiently, as though to dismiss the subject, but was curiously taken aback when she came a step nearer to him and looked boldly in his face.

"Will *you* learn me them?" she asked.

Fitzgerald threw himself back in his chair and laughed. It was a good notion that, truly!

"Don't laugh," cried the little thing, looking at him fiercely and stamping her foot. "Ye have no right to laugh at me! I *will* learn how to read. Someone must teach me."

Fitzgerald glanced at her for the first time with a certain interest. The child was growing slim and tall; her frock was much too short for her, and though Martha had done her best to make her presentable with the scanty materials allowed to her, she had a certain unkempt look, which struck the man with a sense of shame. Then, how eager was her face—how intelligent were the eyes! It was certainly time she should receive some education.

"Why are you so anxious to learn how to read?" he said, in an altered tone.

"Because I want to know things," said Erin. "I want to know about Oliver Cromwell," she repeated doggedly.

"Well, go back to your chair. You shall know all about Oliver Cromwell, and many other things, too."

Erin clapped her hands and retired; pausing, however, when she had got half-way to her place, to cast a backward glance and a smile, half shy, half saucy, at her uncle.

"Thank ye!" she said.

CHAPTER VII

EDUCATION

THE old schoolmaster, who had for many years taught the children of the neighbourhood, at Glenmor National School, was much astonished on receiving a visit from Mr Fitzgerald one morning, and still more on learning its object. This was no less than to secure his services for two hours daily to instruct Miss Erin Fitzgerald in reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic.

"Nothing else, mind"; he added, drawing his fierce eyebrows together. "How long will it take you, do you suppose, to get that into her?"

"It depends so much on the young lady herself, you know, sir," stammered Mr Finn.

"Three months, do you think?"

"Well, I would hardly like to venture on a decided affirmative, sir."

"Six months, then? The child is nearly nine years old, sharp and eager to learn."

The schoolmaster thought he might possibly venture to promise that in six months Miss Fitzgerald would be proficient in such elementary knowledge as he was to be permitted to impart.

"I engage you for six months, then," said the other, cutting short the flowery sentence, and at once proceeding to terms. These, it need not be said, were not high; but then, as Mr Finn

pointed out with an elegant bow, the honour was great.

Two hours a day of conscientious instruction can do a great deal for an intelligent child. At the end of six months Erin could read fluently, write like copper-plate, and rattle off her "tables" in a manner which was the admiration of all who heard her.

On the morning after the allotted period had expired, she was summoned into her uncle's study.

"Well," he said, resting his chin on his hands and looking at her fixedly. "So Mr Finn is not coming any more! What will you do now?"

"I don't know," said Erin.

"Do you like your lessons?"

Erin nodded.

"You want to go on with them?"

She nodded again.

"Who is going to teach you, do you suppose?"

Erin hesitated for a minute or two, and then, apparently struck by a sudden thought, pointed a small forefinger at her uncle.

"Yourself!" she said.

"Yes, I am, and you'll have to work your very best, let me tell you. No idling, no arguments, no nonsense of any kind—do you hear?"

Erin nodded again, a smile breaking over her face.

"Will you learn me out of them books?"

"I shall have to teach you to speak before I do anything else, I fancy! No, you will have nothing to do with these books. They are Greek books—most of them."

"What's Greek, an' why can't I learn it?" said

Erin, drawing one of the volumes nearer to her and opening it. Her face fell as she caught sight of the unfamiliar characters, but she looked up again boldly.

"That's something like an Irish book Mr Finn has," she remarked. "Mr Finn said he could easy learn me Irish—teach me, I mean—only you bid him not. Why can't I learn Greek, then?"

Fitzgerald laughed: the indomitable little creature's thirst for knowledge interested and amused him. It would be great fun to make a blue stocking of her. He had proposed to undertake her education partly from notions of economy, and partly because, though it was imperatively necessary for the child to have instruction of some kind, he did not choose that any outsider should interfere with her. But now an odd fancy struck him; he would make a scholar of the girl — people should see through her what Louis Fitzgerald could do, how cultivated was his intelligence, how widespread his knowledge. For causes already stated, the world at large knew nothing of his private pursuits—but there was no reason why he should not prove to it, by means of his niece, that he was no ordinary man.

"You want to learn Greek, do you?" he said, "Latin too, I suppose; everything I know, in fact?"

"I do!" cried Erin, her blue eyes looking as though they would jump out of her head with excitement.

"The sooner we begin the better, then!" remarked her uncle, with a grim smile.

It would, indeed, have surprised many of Fitzgerald's neighbours to learn that he had any marked taste in addition to his passion for money-making. But such

was the fact: he loved to pore over certain antiquated editions of the classics, musty old volumes whose pages the schoolboys of a bygone age might have laboriously conned; adding footnotes of his own to the learned commentaries of the good doctor or divine who had, a century or so before, presented this "new edition" to the rising generation of scholars. These were almost as dear to him as the title-deeds of his estate; and this fancy of his was, after all, not so very difficult to account for. At the age when other youths were distinguishing themselves at college, Louis Fitzgerald was devoting heart and soul to the commercial career in which he ultimately achieved success; but in his spare time he applied himself to such studies as he held to be essential to the education of a gentleman, providing himself for the purpose with as many dog's-eared volumes as he could pick up for scanty outlay at secondhand bookstalls. He had formed few new habits during the course of his long life, and this old one was, therefore, all the stronger. Louis Fitzgerald, the millionaire, still haunted shabby bookstalls in out-of-the-way localities; adding frequently to his collection of classical treasures, underlining the passages which he deemed finest, and adding, as of yore, notes and comments of his own.

Surely never was girl's education so odd in its nature, or so curiously conducted, as that which was now administered to Erin Fitzgerald. Her uncle, Father Lalor, Pat Nolan—even Moll Riddick, assisting in his or her way in the formation of this young mind. Mr Fitzgerald's part was, of course, the most important; and as time passed, and his pupil made rapid progress, he experienced a curious kind of pleasure in his task. Erin, on her side, put forth all

her little strength, dreading unspeakably the gibe which was the punishment of failure, and being proportionately elated at the grim smile which betokened success. They loved each other no whit the more, this ill-matched pair, for all their hours of companionship; but each conceived an odd kind of respect for the quality of the other's mind.

Pat Nolan chiefly confined himself to the inculcation of history—his lore being, if slightly vague as far as dates and dry facts were concerned, rich in highly-coloured detail. But Erin believed in him far more than in the history books which she was now able to peruse, and did peruse with breathless interest in spite of her scepticism. On one occasion, indeed, she flung "Macaulay" furiously away from her, indignantly announcing that he was telling lies. Father Lalor, who was a little concerned at the plan of education marked out for the child, and feared in his simple way that she too might be "led astray" by the course of reading in which she was now permitted to indulge, endeavoured to counteract the evil impressions which might possibly result by giving her the run of his small library—which, like the libraries of many Irish priests, consisted chiefly of books bound in green, of a semi-religious semi-historical character. With their aid, Erin learned a good deal of the past history of her country; of "plantations" and "penal laws," and the sufferings of Irish Catholics in those bygone terrible times, which are, it would appear, never to be forgotten. And her eyes flashed through indignant tears as she read them, and her voice would break, and her childish bosom heave, as she discussed them with Father Lalor or Pat Nolan. The latter applauded her sentiments to the echo, and supple-

mented her newly-acquired knowledge with a gory anecdote or two that he himself had "heard tell of"; but the old priest would contemplate her sometimes with a puzzled look, and endeavour to check her enthusiasm.

"Ay, ay, child—they suffered greatly and have their reward now, thanks be to God! Those dreadful times are done with. It's well, indeed, to remember how true Ireland was to the Faith, and all she suffered, so that we may be proud of our country and worthy of our inheritance. See how much an Irish child like you has to be grateful for, Erin. There you are with the Faith your forefathers died for, living in your heart—love your religion as they did, my dear, and act up to the spirit of it."

"And I'm the child of an Irish patriot, too," cried Erin, throwing back her little head, "and a child of the people. I must never forget that, Father Lalor, must I? I must be as ready to die for my country as my papa was."

"Pooh, my child, you won't be called on to do that," cried the old priest in some vexation. "You oughtn't to be talking too much with Pat Nolan about those things. He's the best little fellow in the world, but those politics of his have nearly turned his head. You belong to an old Irish Catholic family, my dear, and that ought to be enough for you."

"My mother was a daughter of the people, Daddy Pat says," answered Erin. "I'm a child of the people, too, and I'm proud of it."

"For goodness' sake!" began Father Lalor, taking a large pinch of snuff, and scattering a good deal of it in his exasperation; he paused, however, drawing the

child nearer to him and surveying her anxiously. Presently a smile broke over his face.

"What's that peeping out of your pocket, my dear?"

"It's a doll," said Erin, flushing very much, and evidently ashamed of the admission, "a china doll—Martha gave it to me."

"Come, that's right!" cried Father Lalor, jovially, "let's have a look at it, Erin—this is something like."

Erin, blushing more and more, slowly produced a small and entirely nude doll, which the old priest hastily waved away after one glance.

"Oh, faith, my dear, that'll do. Keep her in your pocket till you dress her."

"Martha hasn't time to make her any clothes," faltered Erin in deep confusion.

"And why don't you make her some yourself? I never heard of a little girl that couldn't dress a doll. Is it possible ye don't know how to sew, Erin, and you getting such a big girl? Sure, that's a disgrace! 'Pon my word it is now—a great disgrace."

"I'm learning Greek," cried the child, with angry tears in her eyes, "I can't do everything!"

"Ah then, indeed, my dear, all the Greek in the world won't mend your petticoat for you. (Is that a tear I see there in it?) I'll think very little of ye, I can tell ye, if ye can't put a stitch in for yourself when it's wanted. And so will everyone. What would your poor mother say, I wonder, if she saw you going about like that, and heard you didn't know how to sew! Now, I'll tell you what you'll do. Run off to Moll Riddick and ask her to show you how to mend that hole in your skirt, and to teach you a few of her stitches. Moll's a great hand at her needle.

She 'd be delighted to give you some lessons. Away with you now, like a good child."

Erin withdrew, deeply mortified, but determined that Father Lalor should never again reproach her with her ignorance in this matter; and the priest, left alone, rubbed his hands and chuckled at the astuteness with which he had turned the current of her thoughts into more practical channels.

Under Moll Riddick's teaching, Erin learnt to hem and to darn, and to accomplish all manner of stitchery—as Martha said, "that child seemed able to turn her hand to everything." She was growing a tall lassie now, slim and graceful; the intelligence in her face so remarkable that it caught the beholder's eye almost before he had time to notice her beauty. Her voice was musical as ever, but she had abjured the brogue of her childish days; her uncle's first care being to correct her peasant accent and manner of speech. She was still deeply attached to the Nolans, and spent every moment that she could snatch from her studies in their company. Mary endeavoured to keep the child as much as possible with her, but Erin grew more and more fond of visiting the shop when Daddy Nolan was at home. She liked astonishing Pat and his companions with her knowledge, and being applauded, and told she was a "hayro" when she delivered her opinions on Irish affairs, past, present, and future. And sometimes she had the good fortune to meet some old '48 man who had known her father, and who would relate stories of his valour that made the tears — proud and happy tears—course down "Miss Erin's" cheek.

Daddy Pat's shop seemed to be quite a political centre of late. Whenever he was at home, he was

surrounded by ardent debaters of different ages and degrees; but Daddy was not always to be found at home—that was the mischief of it—he required a larger field for his energies, and an increased amount of stimulant to support him under the strain. Very often now did Erin find her nurse sitting by the fire with her apron over her head. And one terrible day, she met Pat Nolan walking homewards with a flushed face and a very peculiar gait. He stared at her as if he did not recognise her, made some inarticulate remark, and tumbled sideways against the hedge. Erin had never seen Daddy Pat in such a condition before, and fled back to Glenmor sobbing all the way with shame and horror and disgust.

Poor Mary feebly endeavoured to disguise the cause of her husband's peculiar demeanour, assuring the child on the following day that Pat did be taken sometimes with such a terrible bad pain and giddiness in his head that he didn't know what he was doing. Erin said nothing; she knew very well what was the matter with Pat, and though she loved him still, and forgave him, she felt that she could never think quite the same of him again.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES

ONE day, when Erin was about thirteen, she was astonished, on entering the study for her daily lessons, to discover Father Lalor closeted with her uncle. Both looked flushed and excited—Father Lalor much flushed and very much excited; but the news he told her when she approached was distinctly of a pleasant order.

"I 've come to carry you off, child—you have been working too hard of late. I 'm going to take you to my sister's place, in the County Kildare, to see what a fortnight's change of air will do for you."

"Oh!" cried Erin, with a spring of delight, that lifted her dark locks from her shoulders and brought the colour rushing to her cheeks.

"Yes, you can go," assented her uncle, grimly. "Run upstairs and put on your hat and pack up your things."

"O uncle, how good of you!" exclaimed the child, looking at him in amazement. "I 'll work harder than ever when I come back, you 'll see."

She flew from the room, shouting eagerly for Martha; and between them they packed her few possessions in a carpet bag, which was with some difficulty hunted up, as for a considerable time no one had required such an article at Glenmor. Erin burst open the study door, radiant; her joy being

a little clouded, however, by the attitude of the two men. Her uncle looked sullen and ill-at-ease: Father Lalor anxious and downcast—yet, surely it was a joyful occasion.

She took leave of Fitzgerald hastily and soberly enough; but once ensconced in a corner of the covered car, her glee broke forth.

"O Father, how kind you are! What fun it is! What on earth made you think of it? Am I going to the sister that has the farm, or the other one? And am I to stay a whole fortnight? How delightful! How did you persuade Uncle Fitzgerald to let me go?"

"There now, my child, sit still. How am I to answer so many questions? I made your uncle see that it would be the best thing for you. You are going to my sister, Mrs Riley, of Ballinagall Farm."

"O Father, I was nearly forgetting. Mayn't we just drive round by Mammie Nolan's? I do so want to say good-bye to her; she'll be so glad."

"No, no, my pet—we'd miss the train. We have only just time to catch it. I'll be home to-morrow, and I'll be seeing Mary Nolan, and I'll tell her I carried you off."

Here Father Lalor took off his spectacles and wiped them, blinking a good deal, and explaining that the dust had got into his eyes. Then he told Erin, he thought if she could keep quiet he would read a bit of his "Office" while they drove along. Erin lay back in her corner, and the old man got out his big breviary, and read in a low tone, that sometimes sank to a whisper, and sometimes was interrupted by groans.

The child was too happy, however, to pay much attention to him, and passed the time pleasantly in

dreaming and wondering about this unlooked-for event in her life; the journey in the train being in itself sufficient to delight and excite her.

This journey, with all its marvels, came to an end at last, and Erin and Father Lalor found themselves at Sallins station; where the priest, hailing a car, desired the driver to take them as fast as he could to Ballinagall.

What a delightful drive was that: Father Lalor had shut up his breviary and apparently dismissed his painful thoughts. As they went bowling along the smooth road—the well-bred little horse "stepping out" in obedience to a command from his master, and the car swinging lightly as they topped the hills and rattled down on the farther side, the driver firing off sundry pieces of information over his shoulder, and Father Lalor pointing out anything which he fancied might interest the child—Erin was in the seventh heaven of delight.

The car stopped at last before a long white gate, which the man opened, walking beside his horse afterwards as he led it up the steep little hill, on the top of which was Mrs Riley's house.

It was a square, pink house, with a slated roof and square windows—not a bit pretty or picturesque, but solid and comfortable. Mrs Riley, who awaited them on the doorstep, was also square and solid as to form, and pink as to complexion; she had grey curls on either side of her face, and was cheery and bright, and comfortable in her ways.

"How are ye, Pat?" she observed, as his reverence slowly descended.

"How's yourself, Lizzie?" returned he, saluting her solid cheek in a brotherly fashion.

"I 'm well," said Mrs Riley briefly. "Is that your little por-to-guee?"

(This was the good lady's rendering of the word "protégée.")

Father Lalor gave Erin a push forward, and Mrs Riley embraced her warmly.

"You and me 'll have the greatest fun," she whispered confidentially; "you'll see what we'll do—when we get shut of his reverence."

She winked with both eyes together in a very knowing and engaging way; and then, darting forward, paid and despatched the carman before her brother, who had been laboriously hunting up his purse, had time to extract the requisite amount of change; and, drowning his remonstrances, hustled both her guests into the parlour.

The parlour had gilt paper in the grate, and a Brussels carpet covered with a white pinafore, and mahogany furniture also in pinafores, and a round table, with a huge china vase in the middle filled with what Mrs Riley called "Popery"—"And who wouldn't go in for Popery if it wasn't a priest's sister?" she was accustomed to remark; whereupon Sally, her little servant, would applaud violently, and say, "Laws, ma'am, it's you that has the wit." Mrs Riley's *pot-pourri* was distinctly home made, and, though the receipt had been given to her by the little old nun who had taught her French at the Presentation Convent at Ballykiltymon, the materials refused to amalgamate as obstinately as Mrs Riley's Irish tongue to adapt itself to the "finnicky" language she was so fond of quoting. The cloves and all-spice overpowered the rose leaves, and the odour of the lavender could not hold its own against the musk.

There was a piano in one corner of the room, which emitted extraordinary jangling sounds when Mrs Riley played on it for Erin's edification—sounds which reminded the child of the music which she and the little Nolans used occasionally to produce with a papered comb and a tin can when they played "band" on holiday afternoons. But the suffering to her delicate ear was more than atoned for by the novel and amusing sight of the little dolls which Mrs Riley caused to dance as she played, dolls with bristles for legs, which, being placed on the strings of the piano, pirouetted and jigged about in a most curious and delightful manner.

The reason why Mrs Riley played the piano at such an early stage of their acquaintance, was the kindly wish to set the child at ease. Erin had begun by inquiring for Mr Riley, and was abashed by her hostess's brief response—

"Buried this ten year."

Partly to hide her embarrassment, the child fell to admiring the pictures on the walls, particularly one which represented an exceedingly blooming little girl, with very blue eyes and very yellow curls.

"Is—was that your little girl, Mrs Riley?"

"Never had chick nor child, me dear," observed her new friend. "That was myself, though you may not think it."

It was then, to cover Erin's blushes and evident distress, that Mrs Riley caused the dolls to gyrate for her amusement.

Surely there never was such a good-natured woman as the mistress of Ballinagall! She was, it is true, rougher in ways and in speech than her brother the priest, but to the full as kind-hearted

and generous. As to her hospitality, Erin was disposed to think she carried it to extremes, especially when she found she was expected to drink cream by bowlfuls; Father Lalor having inadvertently remarked that it was considered fattening.

He went home next day, leaving Erin seraphically happy in her new quarters. Many a "jaunt" did Mrs Riley give her in her outside car, many a picnic did they indulge in, many a ride did Erin enjoy on the wicked little kicking donkey, keeping her seat after a fashion which delighted all onlookers. Then there were the delights of the farm itself; the cows and the pigs and the poultry. Mrs Riley made her a present of one beautiful little hen, telling her that the eggs it laid should be her own. Thereupon Erin began to "save them up" for the Nolans. Each egg laid by "Speckle" was duly buttered, and labelled "Patsy," or "Maggie," or "Nora," till her foster-brothers were provided for. Mammie was to have the freshest of all.

She was genuinely sorry to say good-bye to her kind friend when, at the end of a fortnight, Moll Riddick came to fetch her away. Father Lalor was not able to come himself, the housekeeper explained —he was quite well — it wasn't *that.* Here she stopped short, looking meaningly at Mrs Riley.

"He's a good deal put about, I daresay," said the latter with a sigh.

"Indeed he is, ma'am," said Moll.

"It's all over, I suppose?"

"It is, ma'am, I'm sorry to say; an' passed off worse even than we thought."

"God help them, the creatures!" sighed Mrs Riley. "What'll become of them at all?"

Moll Riddick shook her head violently, pursed up her lips, and finally, crossing over to Mrs Riley, whispered something in her ear.

"Oh, my gracious! Ye don't mean that. An' he such a poor harmless little creature, they say—no one's enemy but his own. God help him! Well! Well!"

Erin looked from one to the other in amazement; both elderly faces, however, according to time-honoured custom when a sharp child is to be hoodwinked, wreathing themselves with smiles on meeting her inquiring gaze. Moll Riddick assumed an extravagant gaiety. Her spirits, indeed, were quite boisterous on the return journey, so much so that Erin, who was inclined to be depressed at leaving Ballinagall and its mistress, felt a little irritated with her.

Once in the covered car, however, which, by Father Lalor's orders, was to convey them to Glenmor, Miss Riddick became very silent; only impressing on the child the advisability of going straight to bed after her supper, and informing her that the priest intended to visit her early on the morrow, and that she would do well to stay at home till he appeared.

"He's too busy to come to-night, dear; and ye couldn't tell what time he'd be able to come to-morrow, and he'd be terribly disappointed not to find ye in," she explained.

Martha received her with a kind of constraint, which wounded Erin sorely. Her spirits had risen on nearing home, and she almost forgot her regrets as she thought of the joyous welcome which awaited her. And now Father Lalor was busy, and Martha was queer, and her uncle more taciturn even than

usual at supper—not that she had expected any transports from *him*; but still he *might* have asked her if she had enjoyed herself, and said he was glad to see her home. She thought once more of Mrs Riley, and Sally, and Speckle, whom she had been obliged to leave behind—*they* loved her, *they* were always glad to see her; she wished she had never left Ballinagall. She swelled with anger and hurt feeling as she thought of these things, eating little, and longing for the meal to be over. In her own room afterwards she shed a few tears; but, catching sight of the much-cherished basket of eggs, they dried as though by magic. She would go and see Mammie Nolan now—at once. She was neither tired nor sleepy, why should she go to bed just because Moll Riddick told her to? Mammie would be glad to see her, Katie, and Maggie, and Mickey would give her a warm welcome, Daddy Pat himself would be overjoyed. How pleased they would be with the eggs—her own eggs, laid by her own dear little speckled hen; they would have "ones apiece" for breakfast on Sunday morning.

She jumped and clapped her hands as she thought of it; and then, basket in hand, crept very softly downstairs and out of the house—Martha must not see her, stupid Martha, who hadn't a word to say this evening, and wanted her to go to bed! In truth, it was quite time for a young lady of her years to be in bed; the late summer dusk was at hand; the pomp and splendour of the Irish sunset having given place to tender and mysterious hues in sky and landscape. Only the distant trees stood out boldly against the still luminous heaven; the rest of the peaceful world was wrapped in gentle shadows,

and indeterminate twilight tones. Far-away mountain shapes seemed to Erin to hover in mid-air, while the familiar ones nearer at hand looked down, as she imagined, kindly, on the slumbering valley. Erin walked slowly, gazing about her and weaving fancies about all that she saw; descrying faintly-glowing islands in the cloud-strewn horizon, the spear-heads of hidden warriors yonder in the fir-wood, a mermaid slowly rising from the blue softly-rolling waters, of which she caught a glimpse as she climbed a hillock, and fairies, and fauns, and dryads, and angels without count, peopling sky palaces and woodland dells.

She quickened her pace when she came to the village. There were the usual knots of idlers outside "Murphy's" and "Fogarty's"; one or two men turned round curiously to look after her, but, contrary to custom, no one spoke or smiled. Erin did not notice it, however. She would soon be with Mammie now: her chaotic fancies had melted into joyful anticipation; she was already in imagination within the cottage kitchen, seated by the glowing fire, seeing the homely, loving faces, and hearing the familiar tones. She broke into a run as she turned the corner, shouting out the children's names, and waving her disengaged hand. Would not Mammie come presently flying to the door? Already she felt her arms about her!

But what was this—what had come to Mammie Nolan's cottage? Erin stood still, her heart beating almost to suffocation, a mist before her eyes. Lo! most of the moss-grown thatch had been torn or burnt off, and the rafters stood bare against the sky; the door was fast closed, the windows broken. As Erin ran forward again, wailing, she saw that the

little garden had been trampled all over, the box hedges broken down, the flowers and cabbages crushed and destroyed. No sign of life remained about this once happy little home, all was still and desolate. But the child, nevertheless, flung herself against the closed door, calling for "Mammie, Mammie!" in an agony of tears, beating the wooden panel till her little hand was bruised and bleeding. Despair and anguish unspeakable, forebodings of misfortune and wrong took possession of her soul, and she sat down on the doorstep where she had so often sunned herself in her babyhood, leaning her head against the lintel, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

Presently a murmur of voices made her look round —a number of men, the idlers aforesaid, stood in the road, looking at her, and making comments on her grief in undertones.

"She may well cry for the work of her own flesh and blood," said one.

"Ah, whisht!" cried another, "it isn't her doin', the jewel. Sure, she's breaking her heart afther them, God help her!"

"Much good that will do her," said a third. "All the cryin' in the world won't comfort poor Pat where he is."

At the sound of this name Erin half raised herself; and, recognising one of Nolan's special friends, cried out eagerly:

"O Tim—Tim Hoolahan—is that you? Where's Daddy Pat? Where is Mammie? What has become of them all? Oh, do tell me what has happened."

"Why then, indeed, ye may well ax, asthore; an' ye'll be breakin' your heart when I tell ye. Sure,

they're all gone, Miss Erin, dear. They were all put out of this little place last week."

"Gone!" cried the child, bursting into fresh tears, and sinking back on the doorstep.

"Ay, indeed, miss; gone, sure enough. Evicted, miss, for owin' the bit o' rent. Och, bedad, they put in a terrible time. Sure, didn't they have the sheriff an' the polis an' all? They took all the roof off of it before they could get Pat out. Ah, well, poor fellow, they have him undher lock an' key now, safe enough."

"Under lock and key!" gasped Erin.

"In prison, miss; that's where he is, for fightin' the polis—and poor Mrs Nolan an' the childer had to go to the workhouse."

Prison! The workhouse! For Daddy Pat and Mammie. It seemed like a hideous dream. The faces of the onlookers swam before Erin's eyes, and she could scarcely articulate the question.

"But who—who did all this?"

There was a pause, during which the men looked at each other; but presently Tim Hoolahan elbowed himself to the front.

"Who but the landlord, miss? I tell you he run them out because he couldn't get the thrifle o' rent out o' them; an' sure—ye know very well who owns all the houses about here."

Indeed Erin did know, too well. Many a time, in spite of Mary's remonstrances, had Pat complained in her hearing of the "rack-rent" her uncle had "put on" him. Bitter shame and anger were now added to her grief—a very frenzy of hatred seized her; she shook like an aspen leaf, but the tears dried upon her scorching cheeks.

She raised her basket of eggs—the eggs which,

like those of the fable, had given rise to so many dreams and plans—and dashed them violently down upon the doorstep, breaking them every one, and splashing the door and the walls of the deserted cabin with their yolks.

Thus did Erin make libation on the desecrated threshold of her former home, in dim tribute to the household gods that had departed, and no less vague invocation of some unseen power who would avenge these intolerable wrongs.

CHAPTER IX

DESOLATE

"COME, boys, what are you doing here?" said Father Lalor, as he elbowed his way through the little crowd, which had rapidly increased in numbers, and now blocked the road opposite the Nolans' house. "Go home, now; go home. It's a sad sight, and you'll do no good by looking at it."

"Ah then, yer riverence, ye'd do well to be spakin' a word to the poor little girl there. Sure, she's breakin' her heart out an' out—an' it no fault of hers. Ay, indeed, the crathur! she thought the light shone out o' Mary Nolan."

"Ah, God help her! she takes after Misther Gerald, so she does. She has the very face of him this minute. She'd be the death of her ould villain of an uncle if she got the chance, God love her!"

"Eh, what—what? Who's that?" said the priest, in great perturbation. "Why, Erin, my pet, what brings you here at this time of the evening? Moll Riddick told me you were in bed, and that's where you ought to be. Come home with me now, child; come!"

"O Father Lalor!" cried Erin, the reproach in her voice piercing the old man's heart, her pallor perceptible even in the increasing dusk, "Father Lalor, you knew—and you got me out of the way on purpose! How could you—how could you?" She stopped, choking with sobs.

"My poor child, what could you have done? I did all I could to prevent it; and when all failed, I thought it best to take you away."

"What could I have done? I would have died before I let this happen. O Father, to think I have been so happy all this time—and—and Mammie! Oh dear, oh dear!"

"Ah—h—h, God help her!" came from the by-standers; those who had been least merciful a little while before being filled with compassion now.

"Will you all go home out of that, if ye please?" cried the priest, in much exasperation; for he was sorely distressed, both at the scene itself, and at the fact of its being witnessed by so many. "Away with you, every one, and leave the child to me. My pet," he said to Erin, when they were alone, kneeling stiffly on one knee beside her, and drawing down the hands with which she had covered her face, "my pet, don't fret so, don't. Poor Mary herself would be breaking her heart if she saw you."

"But where is she now?" cried Erin; "and the children, and poor Daddy Pat, who never did anyone any harm in his life! O Father, Father, Father!—they were all so good—and so happy. And look at their poor little house now, and their garden—and all because they were too poor to pay the rent! Oh! I don't think there was ever anyone so wicked as Uncle Fitzgerald. I—I can never be happy again!"

In vain did poor old Father Lalor exhaust himself in well-meant endeavours to console her. Like Rachael of old, Erin wept, and would not be comforted. It was such a breaking up of all her childish beliefs and ideals. Her faith was shaken in everyone and everything, from Providence itself — the

all-bountiful Providence, whose special province it was, as she used to think, to watch over good, prayerful, trusting souls like Mary Nolan, and keep them from evil—to Father Lalor, who had tricked her, got her out of the way, allowed her to be deluded with false happiness, while this tragedy was befalling her nearest and dearest; Mrs Riley, too, Martha, Moll Riddick—all—all had deceived and betrayed her! As for her uncle—no words can describe the loathing she felt for him; the horror and disgust at what she held to be a monstrous wrong.

Erin suffered Father Lalor to raise her at last, and to lead her home. Early, however, on the following morning, she presented herself at the Presbytery.

"Father, will you take me to see Mammie to-day?"

"Child—to the workhouse? You know she is in the workhouse?"

"Yes, I know."

"Dear, I don't know what to say," murmured Father Lalor, looking anxiously at the white face, with its dark-rimmed eyes, the little hands clasping and unclasping themselves. "I don't think you are fit for it. It's not a place to bring you to."

"O Father, I *must* go!" cried Erin. "I will go—I will go by myself, if you won't take me."

"Well, well, we'll see. You must be very quiet, you know, and—and try not to fret, for poor Mary's sake. God help you both!" he added to himself.

Never in after-life did Erin forget that meeting with her foster-mother. Every detail of it was seared into brain and heart. The grey prison-like building, the long, bare rooms, with women talking and laughing—so many women, and some with such hideous faces—the yard where, from a window, she

caught a glimpse of Maggie and Nora, standing with sad, puzzled looks in the midst of a boisterous, dirty little crowd—and then Mammie, in her workhouse dress, with her sweet eyes red and swollen with weeping. Mammie, who could only sob, and clasp her in her arms, and sob again—it was like a terrible nightmare, only no dream-anguish was ever so poignant!

Then came a period of illness—the child's overwrought mind reacting on her body—which lasted for some weeks, her recovery being retarded by the news of the Nolans' intended emigration. Pat, who was now out of prison, had relations in America who were, it seemed, doing well, and who had sent the money for their journey. It was the best thing they could do, people said, and perhaps the change would be the making of Pat; but Erin, hearing of it, turned her face to the wall, and wept as though her heart would break.

Nevertheless, on the morning of the Nolans' departure, she insisted on going to the station to see them off. There was quite a little crowd there, and as the whistle sounded, and the train moved slowly away, some women began to *keen*, and the monotonous, unearthly chant drove Erin almost distracted. Snatching her hand from Father Lalor's, she staggered after the train, crying pitifully to Mary Nolan, whose white face was still visible at the carriage window, and at last falling in a dead faint on the ground.

"This 'll be the death of her!" cried the old priest. "I ought never to have brought her—but she was bent on it."

Erin was indeed ill for many days, during which she was haunted by Mary's face, and the keening

sounded perpetually in her ears. Father Lalor prevailed on her uncle to send her to Ballinagall again; and there Mrs Riley's care, and the fresh air, and the absolute quiet, restored her to health—though, as her friends sorrowfully agreed, she would never be the same child again.

It was true—Erin, in fact, after this great trouble, ceased to be a child at all. With all her cleverness and precocity she had hitherto been very babyish in some ways—she had cherished her doll in her very heart of hearts, and dearly loved a romp with Martha or the little Nolans. On rising from her sorrowful sick-bed, however, she put away from her, for ever, the things of a child. She had given her doll to little Nora on parting, and she steadily refused another; she was silent and sedate, reading much, and appearing to think more. One point on which she was firm, though it troubled and alarmed those about her, was her determined rejection of her uncle's offices as tutor. She loved her lessons, but she hated him, and the hatred predominated. Not all Father Lalor's entreaties nor Fitzgerald's angry threats prevailed against this resolution of hers.

"Grow up an ignoramus, then!" cried her uncle furiously one day, "it's all you are fit for—I might have known you would never persevere."

Erin looked at him with a curious expression, but said nothing.

"It is a pity you did not emigrate with the Nolans," he sneered; he knew perfectly well the reason of Erin's rupture with him, though she had never openly reproached him.

"I wish—I wish I had!" said the girl passionately.

Mary Nolan wrote sometimes; ill-spelt, loving, letters. It would seem as though the neighbours were right, and that they had done well to emigrate. Pat had turned over a new leaf, she said, and Bridget and Patsy were in situations, and they were all getting on, thank God; and Miss Erin wasn't to fret. And then the page would be blurred, as Mary added that her heart was still in the little place at home, and that she did be often fancying she was back in it and listening for her darling's step, though God knew she ought to have more sense than to be romancing that way, and she was sure that even if they were never to meet again, Miss Erin would never forget her.

Erin could read between the lines of these simple missives, could see Mary's eyes reddened with the tears which had blotted them, and fancy the longing for the old country and the old home which had overwhelmed her as she scrawled that almost illegible postscript. How she must have envied the letter which would go sailing back to Ireland, be touched by Irish hands, and pressed to her child's heart. And then Erin would passionately kiss the row of little crosses at the end and sob, and register all kinds of desperate vows. Forget Mammie! Never, never! While she lived she would treasure the memory of her foster-mother and her home—the only home she ever knew, the home which had been ruthlessly destroyed by her nearest in blood. And then she would make vague furious resolutions to let the world hear of it some day—to force her uncle to allow Pat and Mary to come back to their little house. Some day she would do such things—as yet she, like Lear, knew

not what—but she meant to astonish people. Perhaps, like Joan of Arc, she would fight for her country, and free it from landlords and Englishmen and all other tyrants and usurpers. Why should there not be an Irish Joan of Arc? The idea, at first merely an idle fancy, gradually took root in her mind. What if she, the child of an Irish patriot and an Irish peasant, were in future years called upon to deliver her country?

Some day, perhaps, she would sway vast multitudes with her eloquence; and then they would unanimously vote her their commander, and she would lead them on to victory or death. Sometimes Erin would try one or two high-sounding phrases on some of her rustic neighbours, and was charmed at the effect they produced. "It's you that has the gift, Miss Erin, dear," said an old woman to her once, wiping her eyes; and the girl's heart swelled with the delightful consciousness of power.

Her happiest moments, or rather hours, were spent in a favourite citadel of hers, the rocky summit of one of the minor hills in the neighbourhood.

It was a very beautiful spot, rock-strewn and wild, and intensely, unspeakably lonely; but Erin loved it for its very loneliness. From her post of vantage she could see a very wilderness of hills of every shape and every hue, from distant ethereal blue, floating as it would seem on the confines of an opalescent heaven, to the giant guardian of the valley, Beanagh-mor, the Golden Spear, cone-shaped, rugged, resplendent, in purple and yellow and green, changing in aspect with every shifting cloud; its deep hollows and unexpected clefts appearing and

vanishing as though by magic, its stony apex now glancing in the sun, like some crystal mountain of fairy lore, now frowning darkly down upon a landscape livid with stormy light, anon misty, shadowy, unreal, leaning as it seemed to her against a veiled mysterious sky.

She loved it best in autumn when the pride and pomp of heather and bracken and gorse had faded to a marvellous golden brown, shading off in the hollows to tender violet, the dry bed of some tiny stream flashing out, white or vividly green, with startling effect. There was no lack of colour there; down, down, far beneath her, Erin could see, on the farther side of her hill, an undulating stretch of woods glowing with the infinite variety of tints of an Irish autumn; delicate, feathery, golden ashes; birches spangled with reddish-brown, oaks, beeches, limes, chestnuts; orange and crimson, green-gold and tawny—surely nowhere else are to be seen so many exquisite hues. Scarlet-leaved wild cherry-trees, blue-grey willows, and here and there a mass of gloomy Scotch firs. Nor was the glint of water, without which no landscape lives, they say, wanting to complete the charm of this. Over the shoulder of Beanagh-mor, Erin could see a long, shining streak, as it were of blue fire, which she knew to be the sea; and afar off, amid those purple mountains, or, still farther, set in that undulating wave of blue, the sparkle of lake or river flashed out like a jewel as it caught the rays of the sun.

Here the little maiden would sit and dream for whole days sometimes, her bare feet crossed—partly for old sake's sake, and partly because of the increased

facility of climbing, she liked on these occasions to divest herself of shoes and stockings — her eyes wandering absently over sky and landscape, her brain busy with facts and fancies. These very mountain fastnesses on which she gazed had from all time afforded protection to Irish rebels; the valley beneath her had been the scene of more than one engagement. Erin's imagination peopled it again with shadowy figures; warlike music sounded in the breeze—the clash of arms, the dull thunder of advancing feet, and then a mighty cry—the cry of triumph. Amid all these dream-forms, one was ever the same, a slight figure clad in medieval armour—thus, by a curious conjunction of ideas, it ever presented itself—with flowing hair, and a slender arm uplifting a flashing blade. It was the Irish Joan of Arc leading on her followers to victory. Sometimes, after the din of battle had subsided, and the enemy was captured and slain, this figure would be seen borne aloft, with shouts of triumph, upon the shoulders of her adherents, and sometimes lying rigid and still under a blood-stained green flag. Erin found it fascinating to gaze on under all conditions; and, on the whole, was best pleased with these last named.

To die—in setting Ireland free—could there be a more glorious fate?

So she would sit for hours, motionless, until the shades of evening filled the valley, and all the mystic mountain shapes stood out in sombre majesty against a background of flame. Then she would rise, and leaving her glorified hill-top, upon the summit of which the light still rested, come down among the shadows to this workaday world.

CHAPTER X

FATHER LALOR IS PROMOTED

FATHER LALOR was, as has been said, much distressed at Erin's present attitude. However little he might approve of Mr Fitzgerald's system of education, there was no doubt that such an education was better than none; and to run wild as she was now doing was, for a girl of her disposition, pernicious in the extreme. But he was getting very old now, and full of infirmities; and when he found his remonstrances and prayers of no avail, he gave up attempting to shake her resolution. In fact, he acknowledged himself wholly unable to cope with her. He did not understand this tenderly-loved little friend of his. Her enthusiasm startled him, her determination distressed him, her passionate nature and impatience of control filled him with fears for her future. He was the only friend she had now, and he was failing fast.

"Child, child, what will become of you when I am gone?" he groaned once, half to himself, after listening, with an anxious, puzzled face, to one of her tirades.

And then Erin ceased declaiming, and burst into tears.

He often sighed heavily as he looked at her, and when she asked him the reason, would reply, sighing again:

"Old age, my dear, old age."

One Ash Wednesday morning, after Father Lalor had distributed as usual the blessed ashes to an innumerable congregation—for Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday are great days in Ireland, days on which every man, woman, and child in the parish rallies round the priest—when he had imprinted a dusky cross on the forehead of the last infant of tender years who approached the altar rails, he straightened himself, and stood for a moment looking over his spectacles at the crowded church, and then raised his hand in blessing; a blessing which was not demanded by the rubrics, but which was prompted by the fulness of his heart.

"Moll," he said afterwards, when he was seated in his parlour waiting for breakfast and his housekeeper came trotting in, her forehead still smeared with traces of the recent ceremony, and her cap very much awry—"Moll, do ye know I have a kind of a feel that this is the last time I 'll be giving ashes in Glenmor chapel."

"Ah, what nonsense, your reverence," cried Moll, setting down the teapot with a bang. "Glory to goodness, did ever anyone hear the like o' that; an' you well an' hearty, thank God. No, but it's fifty times more you 'll be givin' ashes in Glenmor chapel. I declare, if it wasn't yourself was afther sayin' it, I 'd be threatenin' to tell the priest on ye."

"Well, well, Moll; you know it is well to remember one's last end. *Momento homo quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris.* I 've said that often enough to-day, and it 's a good thing to be thinking of. Sure, I 'm going on eighty, Moll; do you know that? Nearly fifty-six years priest. Isn't it time for me to be taking a rest? Ay, ay; I 'd be glad

enough to go, only for one thing. But the Lord knows best. We're all in His hands. Moll—is that what ye call tea, woman dear?"

"God bless us, I forgot to put the water in! Sure, ye have me moithered altogether, talkin' that way," wept Miss Riddick, wiping her eyes and retiring with the teapot.

Father Lalor laughed and became once more his cheerful self, and Moll forgot his presentiment until Mid-Lent Sunday, when it was painfully recalled to her memory. Father Lalor had a particularly slow and distinct utterance in saying mass, every word being audible. What, then, was Moll's surprise and terror when she discovered that on Sunday, and "Lactare" Sunday to boot, clad moreover in white vestments, Father Lalor was saying mass for the dead!

She could not wait until he came home for breakfast, but went into the sacristy at the conclusion of the service.

She found him standing, still in chasuble and biretta, in the middle of the room, with a curious half-smile on his face.

"Ye're not feelin' quite yerself this mornin', are ye, sir?" she asked him, tremblingly.

"Moll," said Father Lalor, "it's a queer thing, there's—there's lead in my shoe."

"God bless us, yer reverence, how'd lead get into it. Didn't I clean them myself last night, and fetch them up to ye this mornin'?"

"It's there though," repeated the priest, in a tone of conviction. "I feel it so cold and so heavy, Moll. See—I can hardly lift my foot."

He made an attempt to do so, but fell suddenly

prone on his face, stiff and speechless: a leaden hand had indeed gripped him—he had a paralytic stroke.

For many days after he lay motionless and unconscious, but at last revived in some degrees, though it was plain he would never leave his bed again.

Often, even before his power of speech returned, his eyes would rest anxiously on Erin, who sat by his bedside with a pale face and woful eyes. She could scarcely be persuaded to eat or sleep; and even when forced to leave the sick-room, would take up her position outside the door, where she would crouch for hours weeping, or praying desperately.

One evening she chanced to be alone with him, Mrs Riley, who was in attendance, having left the room for a moment; and suddenly he spoke in the feeble stammering tones with which they had become familiar.

"Erin, my pet—I'm going from ye—ye know that?"

"Oh no, no, Father! I can't let you go. God will make you get better, I am praying so hard. You are the only friend I have in the world. God will not take you away from me."

"Faith, my dear," he said, with something of his old quaint manner, "I don't see why we should expect the Almighty to perform a miracle for the like of us. And it would be a miracle, Erin—nothing less, if I am to recover. No, no; the Lord has called me, and I'll have to go, child. He's askin' us to make the sacrifice, each in our own way—you in the beginning of your life, and I at the end of mine. It's the last He'll require of me; and as for you, my pet, you're in His hands—I leave you in His hands. He made you, and

He'll protect you. Come here, child—close—and kneel down."

Erin obeyed, sobbing, and the old man, feebly lifting his hand, marked the sign of the cross on her forehead.

"May the God of the fatherless be with you!" he said. "I surrender you to Him. May He watch over you in all your ways!"

After this last great effort he ceased to take any interest in earthly things, and concerned himself wholly with his own spiritual affairs.

"When the end is near," he said once, with his quiet smile, "it's just the same for priest or layman. There's only yourself and God. No matter how many souls you may have had to look after in your lifetime, at the last, you must just concern yourself with your own."

One day he asked suddenly, "Do you hear the bell, Erin?"

"What bell, dear Father? I don't hear anything?"

"I thought," he said, knitting his brows, as though making an effort to concentrate his attention—"I thought I heard a bell tolling. They'll all be praying for me, won't they? All my faithful people. . . . Come to his assistance all ye saints of God; meet him all ye angels of God; receive his soul and present it now before its Lord."

Erin leaned forward, startled; the old man's fixed, unrecognising gaze, betokened that his mind was wandering. He continued to recite slowly and impressively the prayers for the dying, that he had said so often by so many poor beds—his voice weak, but infinitely solemn.

"May Jesus Christ receive thee, and the angels

conduct thee to thy place of rest. May the angels of God receive his soul, and present it now before its Lord. . . . Lord, have mercy on him, Christ, have mercy on him, Lord, have mercy on him. Our Father. . . ."

The greater part of this prayer being said "in secret," his voice dropped suddenly; but he seemed to lose the train of thought, and presently fell into a doze. His mind, however, appeared to run perpetually in this groove, and in his fancy he frequently said mass for the dead, and repeated the last blessing and the Litany for the departing soul. During his transient moments of consciousness, he was still busy with his preparations for this great "flitting."

He did not appear afraid, only solemn, and deeply in earnest. One day he said with pathetic simplicity:

"I think, you know—I think I have always done my best. I always tried to do my best—and God knows that. He will remember that when I go to my account. Fifty-six years—fifty-six years! Think of all the souls I have had the charge of in fifty-six years. And I must render an account of all! an account of all . . . but I think I have always done my best."

"I fancy," said Mrs Riley, that same evening—"I fancy, Moll, that I can see a change. He's got the look, ye know——"

"Ay, an' the colour's altered," said Moll.

Both women had been weeping, and even now restrained their tears with difficulty. There was a kind of desperate resignation in their look and manner as became those who were bracing themselves up to bear a great blow. Erin looked from

one to the other, turning sick and cold; she had never been so near death before, and the awfulness of it overwhelmed her. This inevitable, terrible, unspeakable mystery, which was about to be brought close to her, by which her friend and father would be snatched away from her, even while she clung to him—eternity itself, as it were, entering the homely chamber to engulf him under her very eyes—for a moment the terror of it outweighed her anguish.

She crept out of the parlour, where this colloquy had taken place, and went upstairs to the familiar room, standing trembling, with her hand on the handle of the door, her heart beating violently. But presently she conquered herself and entered, all her fear vanishing at the first sight of the dearly-loved face. It had changed since she saw it last, but for the better, she thought; a certain settled majesty of line and expression had taken possession of it—it had even lost the drawn look which it had worn for so many days. But the white hair lay damp and heavy on Father's Lalor's brow, and he breathed with difficulty. He smiled at her as she approached, and then his thoughts floated away from her again to the empires of that vast world which he was so soon to enter. His lips moved, and the child bent over him to listen!

"To Thee, O Lord, the angels cry aloud . . ." he murmured, over and over again.

"Ah," said Mrs Riley, who had followed Erin into the room, "he's been saying it ever since morning. You know what it is, dear? . . . it's from the *Te Deum*."

Moll entered presently, with the priest who had

attended Father Lalor during his illness. The old man had squared his accounts with his Master long before, and now merely greeted his young companion-in-arms with the same comfortable smile which he had bestowed on Erin, and betook himself again to the great half-open gate through which he had already caught the echo of angels' voices. It was his last sign of recognition; already he had wandered beyond their reach, though they clasped his hand and listened to his voice. Erin's young and passionately human heart rebelled; he was there still, and she was dearest of all to him. Would he not look at her once, only once more, return a single pressure of her hand? She thrust her poor, little, eager, quivering face forward as he turned his head, and cried aloud:

"O Father, Father, dear Father, speak to your little Erin! Only one word—one word. Look at me, just look at me, to show you hear me."

But Father Lalor heard no more; his eyes were fixed on things that she could not see; he had gone too far on his great journey to pause or to look back.

Erin sank down on her knees again, and for some time there was no sound in the room but that of the patient's laboured breathing and the low tones of the young priest. Then there came a silence, a long silence, broken at last by the voice of the old man.

"Mother!"

He had raised his head for a moment, with an expression of astonishment and unutterable joy—and then it fell back.

He was gone. A great awe fell upon them all. For a moment no one stirred or wept. At last—

"Our Mother came to fetch him," said Mrs Riley tremulously.

"Oh no, ma'am, sure it was the Holy Virgin herself he saw," added Moll, stooping to kiss the inert hand.

Whether it was indeed the mother of his youth upon whom the white-haired priest called with his last breath, or that other Mother, whom for all time all nations shall call blessed, certain it is that he died with that hallowed word upon his lips. It was a meet end to his most simple and innocent life—as a little child he entered the Kingdom of Heaven.

CHAPTER XI

ERIN THE MOTHER, AND ERIN THE CHILD

IN the general grief and confusion which ensued, no one had time to notice Erin, and she crept sadly out of the silent house and into the desolate garden. But the sight of the bony old horse grazing in the adjoining paddock smote her with the sudden keen anguish with which we look on the familiar things which the beloved dead will need no more. The horse raised his lean neck and looked over the hedge as though he expected his old master to call and caress him, and Erin, uttering a little cry, threw herself down in a corner of the garden, too much stunned to weep, but unspeakably desolate.

At last she was roused by Moll's voice calling her, and rising, she re-entered the hall, where she found Miss Riddick awaiting her.

"Would you like to look at him now, Miss Erin, dear? We have him laid out, an' he looks beautiful."

Erin followed her upstairs without speaking, but trembling like an aspen leave, and once more a prey to a fear which she would have died rather than own.

The shutters were closed, and the room draped with black and lighted only with wax candles. For a moment Erin's limbs almost gave way beneath her, and she paused on the threshold, scarcely daring to look towards the bed. But at the first glance her dread again melted away and irrepressible tears

gushed from her eyes. Robed as for mass in full vestments, his hands clasping crucifix and rosary, his face absolutely placid, and wearing its usual gentle smile, Father Lalor looked exactly like his own familiar self. As Erin gazed at him she almost expected him to open his eyes and speak to her. She drew near and kissed the clasped hands, feeling no fear now though they were so cold, and gazing tenderly on the kind face.

By-and-by, Mrs Riley would have led her away but she refused; and during the ensuing days the dead priest's former parishioners who came flocking to steal a last look at him, grew familiar with the sight of the slight figure kneeling or crouching in a corner.

But all too soon they bore him away to the little chapel where he had so often prayed and preached; and his flock gathered round him for the last time.

There is something peculiarly touching about the funeral of a priest, especially one of the stamp of Father Lalor. The coffin—placed at the foot of the altar steps, on the very spot where he usually stood—the worn old biretta, the chalice and paten, always used by him, on the top; the familiar solemn words repeated by strange lips over him who had so often shed tears as he pronounced them: his homely friends could picture his face still with its unfeigned sorrow as he blessed their dead, could hear the very tones of his voice. And it was *he* who lay there now so still, who was about to be carried out of his own church and laid under the sod!

It was over at last—even the "keening" had come to an end, and the crowd had melted away; only a few knots of people lingering here and there near the churchyard.

Erin, kneeling unobserved behind a tomb, overheard one man asking another, who did he think they 'd be havin' now in place of Father Lalor.

"Ah, God knows," was the reply. "Maybe some stranger altogether. A young priest, most likely. Father Lalor wasn't above thirty when he came here, I 've heard him say. We 'll be apt to find the differ —God be with the holy man that 's gone."

Erin sprang up — somehow this aspect of the matter had not hitherto struck her. A new priest, a stranger in Father Lalor's place! Now, indeed, she realised that he was gone—gone for ever! Not even the sight of the coffin, the lowering of it into the grave, had brought her loss home to her as did this chance phrase. It was inevitable, of course, that Father Lalor should have a successor—but oh! how should she bear it?

She climbed over the low churchyard wall, and ran as fast as she could to her favourite mountain seat, where she flung herself down, abandoning herself to her misery.

She had no one now—no friend, no Father. Mammie Nolan was miles and miles away—in another world, as it seemed to her. She was all alone in the one she knew, with no one to care for her, no one to confide in, no one who would mind whether she lived or died, no one to love. How should she live without some one to love? She sat up and looked round her, as though to read her answer in sea and mountain and sky; and all at once it seemed to the passionate and imaginative little creature that there was indeed an answer there. The beautiful pure dome, blue, changeful, transparent, as only Irish skies and Irish eyes can be, filled her with a sense of rest; and around and beneath her the

exquisite, glowing colours of hillside and landscape appeared to woo her, to appeal to her as they had never done before.

"My mother-land, I will love *you*," cried Erin, kneeling and stretching out her arms, "I will love you—you only. I will devote myself from this moment to you—entirely and for ever . . . heart and soul. Erin, my mother, I will love *you*!"

The sea-birds were calling each other yonder, and faint echoes of their cries broke the silence which ensued; the peewits, circling over her head, whistled as they whirled and dipped; the breeze rustled softly through the heather, and from the far distance sounded the bleating of mountain flocks, the lowing of kine—earth's voices, as the child thought, endorsing her vow.

She left her rocky eyrie, and wandered for a little space along the crest of the hill—her face glowing, her eyes kindling in spite of her recent tears. How beautiful this mother of hers was, how well worthy of all love, all devotion!

But when her eyes strayed toward the spot where her old friend lay at rest, she wept again and sank down on the mossy slope, stretching out her arms as though to clasp it.

"Oh, my mother Ireland, I am sad and lonely. You are all I have—love me, and I will love you."

Stretched thus upon the warm and fragrant hillside, this curious, fanciful little maid told herself that she was lying upon her mother's bosom, and felt soothed and comforted.

No one who was not thoroughly acquainted with the girl's peculiar nature, and who had not realised the effect produced upon it by her unusual surroundings and education, could understand the phase into which

she now entered. She had, to begin with, inherited very opposite qualities from her parents—her father having endowed her with much of his dreaminess and impracticableness; and the peasant blood of her mother carrying with it certain characteristics of its own. The child could love passionately, and idealise the object of her love—she could also hate and resent savagely. She had acquired just enough out-of-the-way knowledge to suit her already exuberant fancy, but was ignorant of all save the rudiments of an ordinary education. She was absolutely undisciplined, and, at the same time, curiously reserved. One can imagine, therefore, the need of such a nature, suddenly cast loose from all its moorings, to devote itself to some worthy object. From her earliest childhood, Erin had been accustomed to hear the praises of her country sung in every tune—the beauty, the sorrows of Ireland—the devoted love of Irishmen for their native land—these were the themes with which she was most familiar. Her own recent griefs were associated with the troubles of her country—all her hopes and dreams bound up with its destiny—what wonder, then, if she now gave herself up to the vivid fancy which had taken possession of her, and which represented her mother, Ireland, as a living, beautiful being—a being to give one's life for, to love with an ardent personal love!

Poor, little, fiery-hearted, eager creature, so full of fancies and emotions and wild impossible plans! How quickly would her dream-worship have been forgotten, her poetical fancies have taken wing, had she but found herself once more in Mary Nolan's honest, hard-working arms, and felt her rough-grained, weather-worn cheek pressed to hers.

Shortly after Father Lalor's death she made a discovery which gave a new impetus to her enthusiasm. Stowed away in an old cupboard in one of the attics, she came upon a locked manuscript book, which she immediately guessed must have belonged to her father. Trembling with delight and eagerness, Erin went down to question Martha, and learned that her surmise was correct, and that, moreover, Martha believed she could find the key of that diary.

"He gave the book to me the day before he was took," she said, "and told me to hide it for fear the police 'ud be comin' to search the house. And so I did—where d' ye think? At the bottom o' the flour barrel. Little did the master think that every bit of bread that went into his mouth those times was flavoured with treason. But, after all, the things poor Master Gerald got printed in the papers was enough for the police—and the speeches he made, and his goin' off to try an' fight! Well, well. I 'll find ye the key, Miss Erin, dear. Who 'd have the right to read that book if you hadn't? 'Keep it for me till I come back,' says poor Mr Gerald; but he never came back no more."

She went to her own room, and presently returned with a very small key, rusty with long disuse.

"There, missie," she said, "take it; an' don't let the master see ye, whatever ye do."

Erin smiled and shook her head as she went away, and presently Martha saw her slight figure flash past the window and disappear among the trees.

"It 'll maybe do her good, an' take her thoughts off a bit," said the good woman to herself. "She 's been mopin' dreadful, poor dear, ever since Father Lalor went."

Erin, meanwhile, sped away to her eyrie, and there, on her knees, opened this record of her father's thoughts and doings. Such thoughts, such plans, such high hopes, such rash doings and short-lived triumphs! And throughout the book, from the first page to the last, what love, what enthusiasm, what passionate devotion to the mother-land, unto whom Erin had vowed her life!

One may fancy the effect of this discovery on such a nature; how every line stirred her heart and fired her imagination; what tears she shed, what a hero she made of this poor dead father of hers! His perils, his adventures, his passionate belief in the justice of his cause—and then the melancholy sequel, imprisonment, exile, death in a foreign land. All this made him more than a hero in her eyes—he was a martyr, she said, unconsciously adopting a word applied often enough to him and his companions by enthusiastic adherents. How glad and proud she was to be his daughter, and how fervently she prayed to be worthy of him! She, too, would fain work and suffer for Ireland—die if need be. Meanwhile she might perhaps write something—like her father—to call attention to, and arouse compassion for Ireland's wrongs. Her father had begun early; an allusion in his journal to his first poem having been written in his sixteenth year caught her eye at once. Why should not she begin—*now*? She was not very much younger, and she was sure she could write prose and poetry, too. There were several sheets of writing paper and some stamps in the little desk that Mrs Riley had given her on leaving. She would compose a poem straightway, and send it to a newspaper—perhaps if she told them whose daughter she was,

they would put it in. Her heart beat fast at the idea—here was something to live for—life was not all dark while it held such a prospect as this. Ideas, and words in which to express them, came thronging to her mind there and then; and she had composed the first stanzas of her poem before she came down from her heights; her dreamy manner, and little transfigured face, puzzling Martha on her return home.

CHAPTER XII

AUTHORSHIP

WHEN Erin's poem was written, in her very best hand on the largest sheet of note-paper, she surveyed it with a curious mixture of feelings. It was called "Voices of the Waves," and ran thus:

What voice is this that mingles with
The thunders of the sea,
And sighs amid the briny breeze
That rustles o'er the lea?
It is the Irish exile's cry,
Deep from his bosom wrung,
Lamenting and grieving, no pity receiving—
His babes on the roadside were flung.

From 'neath the humble roof of thatch,
Where all his race was born,
A tyrant hand has dragged them forth
And down the homestead torn;
His wife was to the workhouse forced,
And he was sent to jail;
While landlords were jeering, and Englishmen sneering,
His anguish could nothing avail.

But tremble now, oppressors all!
The sands are running fast,
And when the meed of wrong is full
Our turn will come at last.
The tide that bears our wanderers' ships
Has menace in its roar,
For each true heart that's riven, each Irishman forth-driven—
One brave soldier makes the more.

Each wave that breaks upon our strand
Brings tidings from afar,

Rejoice, rejoice, loved mother-land,
In bondage though you are!
Your sons a hundred thousand strong
Are mustering o'er the sea,
Soon tyrants will be quailing, as back they'll all come sailing—
To break your chains and set you free.

It did not quite come up to the ideal poems which had long been floating in embryo condition in Erin's fancy, and she was not sure if the change of metre at the end of each stanza was an improvement or the reverse. The verse certainly did seem to halt a little here and there, and the final lines did not sound right somehow. The fact that there was no immediate prospect of an Irish-American invasion did not trouble her in the least, however. She was pleased with her work on the whole, and the last stanza struck her as distinctly fine. With trembling hands she signed her name, "Erin," folded up the paper, and enclosed it in an envelope. After a little reflection she wrote a short letter to the editor of a certain newspaper, which she had often seen in the hands of Daddy Pat; introducing herself as the daughter of Gerald Fitzgerald, and asking him for her father's sake to insert her poem. As she was not yet fourteen and quite ignorant of the rules of versification, she trusted its faults would be excused, and hoped to do better work in future. A copy of the paper was lent to her by one of Pat's friends, and she had no difficulty in directing and despatching her packet; but, as she forgot to give her own address, it is not surprising that she received no acknowledgment.

Her poem was inserted, however, and she saw it with her own eyes in a narrow sheet which, after

what seemed an interminable week, Tim Hoolahan lent her. There was an editorial note, moreover, affixed to it. "We should be glad to hear more of 'Erin,' who has, by the way, omitted to send us her address. Her father's name, though she does not authorise us to mention it here, is in itself a passport to this journal, and her own work gives distinct promise for the future, besides being, as it stands, spirited and vigorous. We would remind Erin that the moral revolution now passing over the country will achieve the end for which she, and all true children of Ireland, look, in a less bloody, but far more effectual manner than by force of arms. Nevertheless, the determination of the Celt to risk everything, even life itself, for sake of his beloved mother-land, backed as it is by the influence and sacrifices of his hundred thousand exiled brethren, is well expressed in these stirring lines. We warmly welcome this new advocate of our cause, whose extreme youth makes her ardour the more admirable."

The flimsy page swam before Erin's eyes; her pride and joy rendered her speechless for a moment or two.

"What is it—what is it at all, Miss Erin, dear?" asked Tim Hoolahan, watching her in amazement, as she stood, apparently transfixed, outside his cabin door. Mrs Tim came forward, clapping her hands, and making inarticulate sounds with her tongue.

"Look, Tim," gasped Erin at last, breaking through her customary reserve in her need of sympathy, "that's my poetry—there. I wrote it, and they have printed it."

Tim's ecstasy knew no bounds: he was almost as proud as Pat himself could have been. This news

flew like wildfire round the village, and before twenty-four hours had elapsed, the fame of Erin's achievement had spread even to the out-lying farms and cottages.

On the following Sunday she received quite a little ovation on leaving the chapel after mass.

"It's yourself that's a true chip o' the ould block, Miss Erin asthore," cried one man. "God bless you for standing up for ould Ireland!" exclaimed another, and presently they set up a resounding cheer for "The patriot's daughter."

Thereupon Miss Erin, carried away by this sudden tide of enthusiasm, could do nothing less, as she conceived, than reward her little group of admirers by an impromptu harangue. She sprang up on the low wall which surrounded the churchyard, and informed them in a few brief sentences, tremulous with emotion, that her dearest hope was to tread in her father's footsteps, that she had sworn to devote her whole life, and every faculty of which she was possessed, to the endeavour to secure the liberties of her country, and that she would be well-content to die, if by so doing she could set Ireland free.

The cheering became so loud after this that Father Kelly, the new priest, who had been making his thanksgiving in the sacristy, came out to see what the matter was.

He was a big, burly man with a broad good-humoured face, and a strong Kerry accent; a great contrast to Father Lalor in many respects, but almost as zealous and kind-hearted. He was not particularly pleased on discovering the cause of the present demonstration.

"Ah, be off home out o' this, all of you!" he cried,

shouldering his way through the crowd, and speaking in tones of great exasperation. "Sure, ye ought to be ashamed to be blockin' up the road that way, and makin' fools of yourselves, roarin' and bawlin' round a poor little slip of a girl. Get down out o' that now, my dear, and go and say your beads in the chapel till all these fellows have gone off with themselves."

He gave Erin his hand, and she descended meekly and somewhat precipitately, accompanying him straightway to the chapel, where she shed bitter tears of shame and mortification. She knew in her heart that Father Kelly was right, and that she had acted foolishly and wrongly; but it was cruel of him to humiliate her before all these people. At least, he should have respected her motives. She told him so presently with flashing eyes, but was rather disconcerted on being peremptorily cut short; Father Kelly bidding her run home as quick as she could, and take care to keep out of mischief.

"Mischief!" she cried. "How can there be mischief in devoting one's self to one's country? How can I help loving Ireland and feeling maddened at her wrongs? You are a true Irishman, Father Kelly, you should be glad that I am anxious to work for the cause."

Father Kelly burst into a jolly "Ho! ho! ho!" which woke the echoes of that lonely place, and made Erin crimson with anger.

"Faith, the cause 'll get on without ye, my child," he said, as soon as he had recovered his gravity; "sure, what do we want with little girls? If you were a woman itself—but even so, it's men's work—men's work. Pray for the cause as much as you like," he added, more seriously, "and do what ye can for the

poor; but don't be speechifying an' talkin' to the boys at all. It 's not your place, and if your poor father was alive, it 's the last thing he 'd wish."

Erin was sobered by this last remark, and went home hanging her head, and feeling her patriotic ardour considerably damped. After all, she could always write, she said to herself when her spirits had rallied in some degree. Lots of girls, young girls, too, wrote for the *Nation* in former days, and everyone praised them for it. She would write and work for Ireland in that way, if she might not take a more prominent position just at present.

But even this project was put to an end, too—a new and most unexpected adversary to Erin's hopes suddenly interfering. The priest had put a stop to her expanding her views by word of mouth, and the parson now interposed to prevent her writing.

The vicar of Glenmor, a refined and kind-hearted man with a large family, had long been exercised in his mind with regard to Erin. He knew something of the child's life from Martha, one of his most steadfast adherents, and had often compassionately contrasted her forlorn and neglected condition with that of his own carefully-nurtured little tribe of girls. It was, of course, impossible for him to make overtures to the child, without laying himself open to the charge of "Proselytism"; while he was not on particularly friendly terms with her uncle, who was to the full as indisposed to support the parson as he was to listen to the priest. But many a time the good man and his wife had shaken their heads over the little wild-looking creature, as she passed them defiantly on the roads, or gazed at them with fierce suspicion when they ventured into the cabins of any of her humble

friends. Of late, there had been more shaking of heads and pursing of lips than ever in the parson's family, when her name was mentioned, and the "Fitzgerald girl" was frequently held up as an awful example of what little maidens should not be.

When Mrs Coventry heard of her last escapade from her cook, who chanced to be an eye-witness of the scene outside the chapel, and was shown Erin's poem, she was neither surprised nor indignant. Indeed, her heart, which was a sensible and motherly one enough, ached for the probable consequences of the girl's folly, and she took the paper straightway to her husband, urging him as a man and the father of a family, to interfere.

"They will be making a sort of 'Goddess of Reason' of the poor child, if something isn't done," she cried.

"But, my dear," said her husband, wrinkling up his brow and looking sorely puzzled, "it's very dreadful, I know; but what can I do?"

"Do?" said Mrs Coventry. "Just go and tell that horrid old man to send his niece to school. Tell him she'll be ruined, and he'll be disgraced if he doesn't take care. It will tickle him up, I fancy, to hear that. Tell him no one ever heard of a girl of fourteen being allowed to run wild, and that it is really dreadful to think what a shocking example she gives — even to the poor children. What is the use of our trying to persuade them to wear shoes and stockings, if a girl of her class goes barefoot? As for *our* poor dear little girls, it makes me quite unhappy to think they should see and hear of such behaviour."

"I don't think I'll tell him that, Constance," said the vicar reflectively.

"Why not? Well, perhaps it is better not to irritate him. Look here, just tell him there are lots of nice schools where they'd take her *cheap*. That'll fetch him, I should think," said Mrs Coventry, who had picked up a few expressive phrases from her schoolboy sons. "Tell him it would be less expensive in the long run, and save him a very great deal of worry. Tell him if he doesn't take care, that girl will lead him a pretty dance; and, look here, just show him this precious effusion of hers—it will prove the necessity of the case better than anything you can say."

"All right, Constance," acquiesced the vicar, who had been drawing on his gloves, and who now went into the hall to provide himself with hat and stick. "I expect to be very badly received, you know—but I'll do my best."

"Oh, but you must stick to it till you make some impression," said his spouse decidedly. "Tell him the girl is safe to come to a bad end if he doesn't send her to school, and that everybody in the place is talking about her."

"Very well," returned Mr Coventry from the garden gate.

"And tell him, Edward—" continued Mrs Coventry, slowly descending the steps.

"Yes, yes, my dear, I'll tell him everything I can think of," cried the vicar, hastening down the village street, his coat-tails flying, and the wide brim of his soft felt hat flapping. He was impatient to be out of hearing, for sometimes Constance charged him with messages which were a little inconvenient to deliver.

Mr Fitzgerald received him as he foretold, very badly; his representations, however, had more effect

than he anticipated, and the sight of Erin's luckless verses threw the old man into a fury of which his visitor had not conceived him capable. He used language most unfit for clerical ears, and stamped about the room in a perfect frenzy, declaring that the girl was worse even than her father, and that he would cast her off, as he had cast off him.

"If she were a boy, I'd flog her within an inch of her life first," he cried; "but, being a girl——"

"Being a girl," said Mr Coventry quietly, "of course you can neither beat her nor turn her out of doors. Why don't you do as my wife says—send her to school? They would soon knock all that nonsense out of her there, and get her properly under control. Besides, as Mrs Coventry says——"

Hereupon the vicar recapitulated all his wife's arguments as persuasively as he could, and was rejoiced to find that they did produce some impression. He finished by making an original statement of his own, and one which, indeed, he was doubtful if Constance would have authorised, but which he rightly judged would have weight with Mr Fitzgerald.

"What is to become of the girl if you don't educate her?" he urged. "Do you mean her to be a burden to you all your life?"

"Eh?" said Mr Fitzgerald. "No—of course not. I didn't think about it. She seemed such a child."

"She is quite old enough to get into mischief, you see," replied the vicar. "She's a clever girl—yes, even these verses, crude and childish as they are"—he laughed a little—"prove there's a good deal in her. Now, a nature of that description runs riot in idleness. With proper training it may become something fine——"

"Yes, the little devil, I know she's clever," growled Fitzgerald. "I used to teach her myself, you know—I meant to educate her altogether; and if I had, I tell you the world would have heard of her in the future. But she won't read with me now—defies me, by——"

"Yes, yes, so I have heard," interposed Mr Coventry hastily. "Well, as I say, you don't wish her to be on your hands all her life; why don't you put her in the way of doing something for herself? Place her in a good school for four years, say. At the end of that time she will be perfectly independent, and competent to earn her own living. But if you don't educate her, she never will be able to do anything for herself—you will be obliged to keep her here always, and she will probably be perpetually in hot water."

"Is there any particular school that you recommend?" asked Mr Fitzgerald, suddenly.

The vicar laughed confusedly, a little taken aback at the prompt and unexpected success of his manœuvres.

"Well, no. I am not in the way of knowing anything about Roman Catholic schools," he began; but Mr Fitzgerald interrupted him impatiently.

"I didn't mention any denomination, did I?"

"No," returned Mr Coventry, "you didn't; but, of course, you meant to." He looked steadily at the other, and laughed again. "I have not the least intention of meddling with your niece's religion, Mr Fitzgerald; and, let me tell you, the place would be too hot to hold either you or me if I did. I daresay I could hear of some suitable school if you will allow me to make inquiries," he added. "I fancy it would be

your best plan to send her abroad for a few years, to France or Germany—or Belgium. I believe Brussels is an excellent place for education. It would be just as well for her to be out of Ireland, and she would learn languages better in a foreign country——"

"I shan't send her to any convent," cried Mr Fitzgerald.

"I am not likely to recommend that," said the vicar.

"Constance would say I had lost an opportunity," he mused, as he walked away. "That child might have been sent to a church school if I had taken her uncle at his word. But there are some things I stick at—and she needn't know anything about it."

CHAPTER XIII

GOOD-BYE, ERIN!

MR COVENTRY'S inquiries resulted in the recommendation of a certain small school in Brussels, kept by a French lady for the benefit of English girls, as the prospectus set forth, though there is some reason to doubt if Mademoiselle Desmanet's philanthropy would have sustained her under the wear and tear of a schoolmistress's life, if some slight benefit had not also accrued to herself.

Her terms were not exorbitant, and the advantages she offered appeared to be considerable. Besides personally conducting the French education of her pupils, and being a native of Paris and *diplômée*—Mademoiselle Desmanet ventured to hope that this was a material consideration—she had secured the services of the very best professors of the Belgian capital for music, drawing, and German; the food provided was plentiful and of admirable quality; and it was her object to unite maternal care with every possible facility for education.

Fitzgerald tossed the letter contemptuously on one side: he cared little about the maternal care and the quality of the food. His niece would be well taught at reasonable outlay: this was enough for him.

As soon as her very modest outfit was ready, therefore, Erin was shipped off. Martha was to put her

on board the mail steamer; and, through the kindness of the Coventrys, a certain Miss Ellis, a schoolmistress, who was taking over some English pupils to her establishment in Brussels, agreed to meet her in London, and take charge of her during the remainder of the journey.

It was early on a cold, clear, October morning that Erin left Glenmor. Day had not yet dawned; the stars were still bright, and a little crescent moon was afloat in a grey sky—a sky, as it were, of transparent darkness. The white walls and black dismal trees of Glenmor looked more ghastly than ever in this half-light, and when Erin's box was carried out from the silent house and tied upon the spectral vehicle at the door, it had, as she thought, a ghastly likeness to a coffin. Martha and she took possession of one side of the car, the driver balanced them on the other, and they set off, the jingling of the harness and rapid steps of the horse alone breaking the silence. The driver, besides being naturally more taciturn than is usual with his kind, was cross and sleepy, Martha was too low-spirited to speak, and as for Erin, it required all her self-control to refrain from bursting into a passion of tears. She thought of how she had wept when Father Lalor brought her to that place nearly nine years before, and how terrible the parting with Mary Nolan had seemed. Alas! far worse partings had taken place since then! The Nolans exiled to the other side of the world, Father Lalor dead, and now this parting, which seemed the saddest of all. Parting with Ireland, going away for long years from her mother-land, her only home—going where she could not see the heather, nor smell the peat, where she would never feel the wayside turf spring

under her feet, nor the mountain breezes, at once soft and invigorating, fan her cheek. Never to hear the kindly brogue—never to grasp Tim or Biddy by the hand—never, in a word, to see an Irish sight or to hear an Irish sound, and this for years and years, till she was quite grown-up, if she did not die of a broken heart meanwhile!

The sheep were still lying down in the fields as they passed, and lifted sleepy heads to look at them; a kind of pearly light penetrated the veil which had seemed to enfold this slumbering world; the universal greyness was changing to a tender bluish-green, melting into yellow at the horizon, and far away in the east rose a great bank of rose-edged purple clouds. The horse's feet were clattering over a pavement now, and many luggage-laden cabs and cars passed them. Was this Kingstown already? And that great ship lying there, with smoking funnels and crowded deck, was that the steamer which was to bear her away?

She accompanied Martha as if in a dream, listening vaguely to her injunctions about remaining on deck and looking after her luggage. Then a bell rang: "Anyone for the shore?" was shouted.

Martha burst out crying. "My lamb, I must say good-bye."

Erin looked up, and seeing the tears rolling down Martha's kind cheeks, flung her arms round her. "Good-bye, dear, dear Martha! O Martha, I wish I was dead."

Martha had no time to remonstrate with her darling, even if she had had the inclination, being speedily hustled on shore, where she stood till the steamer was out of sight, waving her handkerchief

frantically to the little figure who gazed back at her with unseeing eyes.

There was a bustle, and a shouting, and a thumping of feet; ropes were being coiled; the water rushed and swirled; Kingstown pier soon became a mere dark streak dotted with liliputian figures: the steamer was at sea. Erin roused herself and went to the end of the deck, looking round her eagerly: not one detail of the scene would she miss —was it not her last glimpse of home. A soft veil of greyish lilac still seemed at the west to unite sea and sky, but overhead there was a dome of turquoise blue, while in the centre of the purple cloud-bank in the east was an ever-widening, ever-brightening glare as the sun climbed upwards. At last he appeared triumphant, scattering his cloud-trammels into golden powder, and streaking the sea and sky with rose and flame-colour. The tall masts and rigging of the steamer were edged with gold, the brown sails of the passing fishing-boats transfigured, the commonplace faces of Erin's fellow-passengers irradiated by the indiscriminate glow. Sudden fires flashed out from roofs and windows on the fast-receding shore, and the mountains—Erin's beloved mountains—stood out stern and sombre against the background of ever-shifting glory. She watched them with straining eyes: "O Ireland, my mother, I am a child of thy mountains—I will be as steadfast, as unchanging as they. I will come back—if I live, I will come back."

The shores grew fainter and fainter, their familar outlines softening, and melting into one another, and at last disappearing; the last gull had tired, and turned his silver wings towards home; now the sun reigned supreme in the midst of a rose-coloured

waste, a great shining path shone out across the dimpling waters. Whither did it lead? Erin glanced at it for a moment, and then turned her dazzled eyes towards home again. Lo! no faintest outline was now defined against that lambent background, not even the most shadowy form remained to mar the unbroken sweep of sea and sky.

In vain did the child gaze, and rub her eyes, and gaze again; she had looked her last for many a day on Ireland.

CHAPTER XIV

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

THE journey to London, the meeting with Miss Ellis—a sharp-looking lady, with spectacles and very gleaming white teeth—the long, weary drive to St Katherine's wharf—all seemed to Erin like a nightmare.

Miss Ellis was too busy with her particular charges to have much time to attend to her once they boarded the *Baron Osy*: and having procured some refreshment for her, and engaged her berth, left her very much to her own devices.

Erin therefore made her way, unmolested, to a retired corner of the deck, where she curled herself up on a bench, drawing the end of her cloak over her face to conceal, as best she might, her wretchedness from the eyes of the passers-by. She was in many ways no longer a child, yet this overwhelming despair and misery were the despair and misery of a child—a child to whom yesterday and to-morrow seem alike, unutterably remote; to-day in its happiness or suffering being all-sufficient and apparently eternal.

It was dusk, almost dark, when she raised her head, and only a few travellers were pacing the deck. Erin watched them vaguely from her corner, occasionally catching fragments of their conversation. First an elderly couple trotted nimbly up and down, evidently absorbed in calculations.

"You forgot the soda water, my dear, that was sixpence," said the old lady.

"Iniquitous!" returned the gentleman. "You didn't tip the chambermaid, I hope. They charged attendance in the bill."

The reply was inaudible, which rather disappointed Erin, who had never heard of "tipping" before, and wondered what it might be.

Next came two of Miss Ellis' charges walking arm-in-arm, giggling incessantly, and casting glances over their shoulders.

Unsophisticated Erin had never before been brought in contact with any specimens of a genus which may be classified: "Common English schoolgirl," and took an instinctive dislike to this couple. They conversed chiefly in whispers, but she overheard a phrase here and there: "Pity he hasn't a moustache!" "Would you call him stuck-up?" "He looked very hard at you the last time we passed."

Presently Erin became aware that the glances and the giggles were aimed at a certain solitary young man, who was pacing up and down, smoking a cigarette, and quite unconscious of these manœuvres.

By-and-by the biggest and boldest of the two young ladies dropped her handkerchief right in his path, and walked on, pinching her companion's arm as she passed Erin, and announcing in a chuckling whisper, "That 'll fetch him!"

But the object of their kind attentions stepped over it absently and strolled on, his eyes wandering vaguely over the water, thinking of nothing less apparently than of the two hoydens. Altering their tactics, therefore, they turned round sharply, so as to face him the next time his measured walk

approached the handkerchief, and the owner stopped directly opposite him so abruptly as to bring him to a sudden halt.

"My handkerchief," she murmured, with a pleading glance.

The young man, with a surprised look, picked it up and presented it to her; then he raised his hat and walked on.

"I call him a perfect gentleman, don't you?" murmured the gratified damsel.

"How he looked at you, Ethel!" replied the other. "I am sure he was longing to talk—oh, I say, there's Miss Ellis coming up the steps! Whatever *will* she say? She must have seen the whole thing. My! Ethel, you'll catch it!"

"Miss Briggs and Miss Hopkins, have the kindness to come down to the saloon!" observed the person in question, the expression of whose face implied that the inference of the young lady was well founded. They both disappeared precipitately down the companion; and their quarry, upon whom the state of affairs appeared at length to dawn, smiled to himself in amusement and, as Erin fancied, contempt.

He was a tall young man, fair, with a clean-shaven face and good features, and Erin looked at him well; for she wondered why on earth those girls had been so anxious to make acquaintance with him, stranger as he evidently was. He had a long coat, which seemed to fit well, and his hands were slender and well-shaped and brown. There was nothing exactly remarkable about him; and yet, a certain something in his air attracted Erin's attention, though she was only a little girl, a something which seemed to indicate that he was a

personage. Perhaps he was a celebrity, and that was why those girls had tried to get him to talk to them. Well, they were very forward in their way of setting about it, and Erin did not wonder he had been disgusted with them. They were rude, vulgar girls—and these were the companions with whom she would be thrown in future, she supposed! Oh, for the gentle Maggie Nolan, with her modest little face, in which the colour came and went so quickly when she talked to a stranger!

The tears flashed to her eyes again—she was overtired and overwrought, and they were dangerously near the surface. She fumbled for her handkerchief, but in vain. It was not in her pocket nor in her lap, nor beside her on the seat. She rose, hunting about with a troubled face and dim eyes.

"I think this is yours," said a voice beside her, and the gentleman afore-described held out the handkerchief, which had fallen under the bench.

Erin flushed crimson—surely he would not think she had dropped it on purpose, like that other horrid creature! In her surprise and agitation, the tears which had been gathering in her eyes leaped out on her cheeks, and stood there, for she did not dare to wipe them away. The young man, who had been passing on, paused suddenly; and, after a moment's hesitation, sat down beside her. The pretty pale face, the tears, the lonely little figure touched him; it struck him all at once that the handkerchief which he had handed to her had felt very damp.

"Going to school?" he said gently, with a pleasant smile.

He took Erin to be quite a child, and, in truth, she looked much younger than she was. Her dress, an old

blue serge, was very short. Martha had thought it good enough to travel in, and advised her not to put on her new one (which came down to her heels) till she arrived in Brussels. She wore a red Connemara cloak, which the country draper had declared to be the height of the fashion, and her dark curls escaped in utter confusion from beneath her plain sailor hat.

"Yes, I am going to school," she said; "but"—drawing herself up a little haughtily—"I have nothing to say to those other girls who were here just now."

"I did not in any way connect you with them," he returned, with a smile, which he quickly suppressed, as he saw a momentary flash of resentment in Erin's eyes.

There was a pause: Erin looked over the boat's side, wishing he would go away; and he looked at her, and thought of the damp handkerchief, and wondered what he could say to console her.

"I suppose it is an experience we must all go through," he observed, after a pause. "I hated it myself, but the home-sickness soon wears off, and one doesn't mind the lessons after a bit."

"Oh, I don't mind the lessons," cried Erin quickly. "I like learning—the more I learn the better—but I —I can't bear going away."

She turned away her head again, and her fellow-traveller saw those tell-tale tears steal slowly over the rim of her cheek, and others creep down to take their place.

"Don't cry," he said gently. "I know it's very hard, but after the first it won't be so bad; and then, you know, there will be letters to look forward to, and the holidays—time soon passes."

But Erin's rueful face did not brighten, and her new friend presently broke fresh ground.

"I should think," he observed, apparently half to himself, "it must be rather pleasant at a girl's school. Girls are such sociable creatures—there is always so much chatting going on among them, and so many little excitements and secrets——"

"Just what I should hate," remarked Erin, still without turning her head.

"You 'll have half-a-dozen intimate friends before you have been there a month," he continued, laughing outright.

Erin faced him.

"I am not a person who makes friends easily," she said; and then, assuming a charming little air of dignity, she half rose, as though to put an end to the conversation.

"Perhaps," said the gentleman, suddenly altering his tone, and rising too, "perhaps you think I have taken a great liberty in venturing to accost you?"

Erin looked up quickly. His voice and general expression were serious, but there was a latent laughter in his eyes which put her on her mettle.

"I am not used to travelling by myself," she said in her most lofty manner; "but I do think strangers should not talk to each other."

"You are quite right, as a general rule; but when one sees a little girl sitting in a corner all alone, and crying her eyes out, surely it is only natural to try and console her?"

The grey eyes which were looking down into hers were smiling still, but more kindly. Erin suddenly felt very small, and young, and forlorn—after all, it *was* good of him to care about her being unhappy. The expression of her face changed, and her eyes fell.

"Am I forgiven?" said he. "Then, I suppose,

I may sit down again"—suiting the action to the word. "Now"—persuasively—"tell me all about your troubles. You'll feel better afterwards."

Erin shook her head. What! confide her private sorrows, the wreck of her dearest hopes, the anguish which she felt at separating from a country romantically beloved, to this utter stranger? Why, she could not have told them to Father Lalor.

"I would rather not talk about myself or my troubles," she said, drawing back a little.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Very well, then; but you must not think of them either. Let us talk of something else. What are you most fond of—music, drawing, reading?"

"Oh, reading!" cried Erin eagerly; "I love reading."

"I knew you did, by the look of you. Now, what sort of reading do you like best?—story-books, of course. Don't be a prig and say you like history, for I am sure you don't! Who is your favourite author—Mrs Molesworth or Miss Yonge?"

"I never heard of either—I think Sophocles is my favourite author—at least, I like 'The Antigone' better than anything I have ever read."

"'The Antigone'?" queried her companion, raising his eyebrows, and looking at her with amused surprise. "Oh, Jebb's, I suppose?"

"No, it is by Sophocles," returned Erin, in utter good faith, and unable to understand his amusement.

"Is this child a humbug?" he thought to himself, "or is she trying to take me in?"

Meeting her candid eyes, however, he abandoned both suppositions, and set himself to draw her out with renewed interest. In a short time, he ascertained

that Erin liked the "Odyssey" too, also the "Iliad" —the "Iliad" she considered rather confused, though she admitted that "bits" were splendid. He listened, and laughed, and plied her with questions; and gradually she grew less cautious, and talked eagerly and excitedly, quoting a line now and then, which proved that her acquaintance with the works in question was genuine so far as it went.

"And so you like 'Antigone' best of all?" he said, after a time. "I wonder why."

"Oh, because she's so real," returned the girl; "she might have lived yesterday. And then, I like her story—it was grand of her to lay down her life for a sacred cause."

"I don't know," said the young man teasingly; "she was rather silly, I think— No, she couldn't have lived yesterday. Girls of our time are much wiser in their generation. You would not catch one of them running unnecessary risks, or making foolish sacrifices."

"Some would, though," interrupted Erin, vehemently. "I know I would. I would die for any cause I held dear."

The wind had freshened considerably, and Erin had taken off her hat, which she had been several times on the point of losing. The small white face, with its eager parted lips and gleaming eyes, looked out from amid the dark fluttering masses of hair with weird effect, as she bent forward earnestly. It remained long in the man's memory. What a tragic little face it was, and how the voice vibrated, and the small hands clenched themselves!

They parted soon after this, for it was growing late, and the night was chilly. The pleasure of Erin's company was not sufficiently engrossing to

conquer her new friend's growing inclination for another stroll and a fresh cigarette — besides, it was time for the little girl to go down to the cabin.

It was long before she fell asleep, though she was exhausted by the long journey. The varied emotions of the day had excited and disturbed her ; and when she at length dropped into an uneasy doze, she was suddenly and rudely awakened.

A shock, a horrible grinding noise, succeeded by a tremor that seemed to shake the entire vessel— then a hurried sound of feet overhead, voices talking and shouting, shrill screams of women from the adjoining cabins.

"What is it? what has happened?" cried Erin, sitting up in her berth.

"We are wrecked!" cried her opposite neighbour, protruding a dishevelled head from under the blankets. Many loud ejaculations of horror, mingled with frantic calls for the captain and the stewardess, were uttered by the other occupants of the cabin. One old German lady in particular, almost deafened her neighbours with her vociferations: "Ach, Herr Je! Ve shall be trownt! Peter! Peter, brü-derchen! Ach, I shall neffer see my brudder again! Pe-ter! Du lieber Himmel! Vere iss de Gabdon. He let us be trownt, and neffer come to say vat habben!"

Meanwhile, most of the ladies had been hastily assuming their outer garments, and now rushed to the adjoining saloon. Erin, who had not undressed, reached the door first ; but though the handle turned, the door would not yield to her efforts.

"We are locked in," she said, turning to the frightened little crowd. If there had been a noise before, it was nothing to the clamour which now

arose. The occupants of all the ladies' cabins poured into the saloon—the schoolgirl contingent contributing piercing yells; while Miss Ellis, without her hair and spectacles, but with her sealskin jacket supplimenting her flannel wrapper, frantically besought them to have a little self-control.

The vessel was now quite still, the machinery no longer working. The noise overhead was as loud as ever, and presently there came the sound of hammering, upon which the hubbub in the ladies' saloon increased.

"We have struck on a rock." "We are going to the bottom." "We are sinking." "I feel the ship sinking." "It is iniquitous to lock us in—will *no* one come near us?" "We shall be left to drown like rats in a sinking ship!"

"Rats leave a sinking ship, don't they?" said Erin. She alone of all the party was calm—so calm that she was a little surprised at herself. Was this really death? Would a few minutes find her in eternity? Well, perhaps it was all for the best . . . better to die now than to live and be miserable—but she wished those women would not scream so. It was a solemn moment.

"Look here," she said authoritatively, "don't you think if we are to die we had better think about it a little, and try to prepare?" As she spoke, someone knocked at the other side of the door.

"Antigone—is that you?"

"Yes," she answered quickly. It was her acquaintance of the previous evening, and he could mean no one but her.

"I thought I knew the voice," he resumed with a laugh. "I have been trying for some time to attract your attention, but could not make myself heard through this outrageous din. How women

can squeal when they like! Look here, don't be frightened; there is not the least danger—we ran into another vessel in the fog and damaged ourselves a little—very little. An hour's work will repair it, and the mishap will have no more consequences than making us rather late. Go to bed again, and tell those other women to do the same."

At this moment the gruff voice of the captain was heard endorsing his advice.

"There is no danger, ladies, none at all! Return to your cabins, pray!"

"But why are we locked in?" screamed a chorus of voices.

"For the good reason that you would be in the way on deck. Besides, you would catch cold. Good-night, ladies. There is absolutely nothing to fear!"

"Good-night, Antigone," said the voice without.

"Good-night."

A sudden calm succeeded the storm of alarm, and some laughter was heard as each party trooped off to its cabin. The old German lady, who had not left her berth, and was still lamenting and calling upon the absent Peter, broke into a wheezy chuckle on learning the true state of affairs.

"Ach, had I not right to stay in my gomfortable bett?" she cried. "I known it was noding. Dese poor laties, dey tink de ent of de vorld was gome!"

And she wallowed among the blankets again, uttering occasional inarticulate grunts in token of satisfaction, until at last she fell asleep, and silence reigned once more in the ladies' quarters.

Next morning, when Erin went on deck, paler and more melancholy than ever, now that the

transitory excitement was over, and that her dreaded destination drew near, her friend approached her.

"Were you very much frightened last night?" he asked, after the first greetings had passed.

"No—I don't think I was."

"Come, you can't expect me to believe that! Think again. What did you feel when the vessel stopped and quivered. Ugh! I must own I thought it exceedingly unpleasant."

"I felt," began Erin—then she paused, continuing with a smile, "I felt rather astonished that I was not more frightened. I supposed we must be going to the bottom, and I thought that it didn't much matter."

He laughed incredulously. "You didn't mind going to the bottom, in fact?"

Erin nodded. "Except for one thing," she added, as an afterthought. "It seemed so stupid to be drowned without having done anything."

"Done anything! Do you mean done anything to deserve such a sad end?"

"No; I meant it seemed a pity to die without having done anything with one's life."

"Well, you are a curious little creature!" ejaculated he. "I wonder what you mean to do with your life when you are old enough to be mistress of it! I should like to watch your career from afar; but how am I to do that if you will not tell me anything about yourself? Don't you think you know me well enough now to tell me at least your name?"

Erin opened her lips, but shut them again, shaking her head. He would laugh and question her. How could she explain all the sacred associations which that name had for her, and the circumstances under which it came to be given?

"Won't you tell me? What am I to call you, then, in my own mind? Antigone?"

"You can call me dark Rosaleen," said Erin, prompted by a sudden mischievous impulse to mystify him further. *Roseen dubh* or "dark Rosaleen" was indeed a synonym for her own name, being one of the mystical titles of Ireland. But this Saxon stranger, never having heard of it, laughed more than ever at what he took to be an unexpected piece of childishness.

During the remainder of the journey they conversed on indifferent topics, and parted at Antwerp excellent friends, the young man repeatedly expressing his hope that they would meet again.

Miss Ellis, being one of those mortals who consider it necessary to be sick whenever they are on sea, and whose nerves, moreover, were fluttered from the adventure of the preceding night, troubled herself little about her charge; and, though Miss Briggs and Miss Hopkins were facetious in whispers as they saw the couple shake hands, the girl simply set it down as an additional proof of their vulgarity. No novels had been included among the books which she had been accustomed to devour, and she herself had lived such a retired life that she was absolutely ignorant of the ways of the world, therefore she did not even know the meaning of the word flirtation, and it never occurred to her to imagine herself in love with her new acquaintance, as some little maidens would have done. She thought him kind—very kind, and that it was generous of him to take so much interest in a girl of whom he knew nothing, simply because she was sad and lonely. Erin retained grateful thoughts of him for a long time, and enshrined him in a special niche in her memory.

CHAPTER XV

"AN ENGLISH ARISTOCRAT"

MADEMOISELLE DESMANET'S house was situated in a narrow little street, one of many in the neighbourhood of the Avenue Louise. Erin was so tired out on arriving that she scarcely took note of her surroundings. A thin, sharp-faced woman met her at the station; this was Mademoiselle Berthe, the assistant. A large, florid lady folded her in an ample embrace, as she entered the house, and this was Mademoiselle Desmanet. She was taken into a dark little dining-room that smelt of onions, and regaled with soup and cold meat; Mademoiselle and her assistant sustaining, meanwhile, an animated conversation in French, and glancing at her several times with curiosity, strongly dashed with disapproval. Presently, seeing that she was almost tumbling asleep in her chair, Mademoiselle rose, and beckoned to her to follow. She led the way to a small room at the top of the house, which, with its carpetless floor and whitewashed walls, was a comfortless-looking place enough; but Erin was not used to luxury. She looked longingly at the beds. If Mademoiselle would only tell her which was hers and go away, that was all she asked.

Mademoiselle paused in the middle of the room, and waved her candlestick towards the bed at the farthest end. Then she opened her eyes very wide,

opened her mouth, and put her tongue between her teeth—these preliminaries being indispensable, she considered, to the pronunciation of English—and then she spoke, very slowly, and taking great care to keep her tongue in the right position. She often remarked that English was a very fatiguing language; still, when one had mastered the difficulty of turning one's tongue in the diabolical English way, everything else came easy.

"Th—dat . . . bed th—is . . . for th—you," said Mademoiselle, proceeding with much violent exertion and a superabundance of *th's*, to make inquiries as to Erin's age and various other matters, and finishing by asking her Christian name.

"My name is Erin," said the girl, hardening herself to meet the wondering comments of this big red-faced woman, whom she was already beginning to distrust; but Mademoiselle accepted it complacently.

"Ah, Irène," she said, in a tone of satisfaction, adding that it was pretty for "th—Englees."

At last, with a wriggle and a sweet smile, she departed, leaving one inch of candle to light her pupil to bed.

In a few minutes Erin had fallen into a sound, dreamless sleep, waking up only when a bell clanged through the house in the dim morning. When she looked out of the window, and saw an uneven pavement instead of the green grass, walls on every side, the very sky seen only in patches through irregular chimney-tops—her heart went down, down, down; she hated the place already.

Downstairs, in the stuffy little dining-room, Mademoiselle Berthe was dispensing coffee to half-a-dozen or so of pupils, some of whom—quite small children—had shared Erin's room. Erin silently took stock of her new companions, flat-faced, uninteresting-

looking little creatures. Mademoiselle Berthe seemed more sour even than yesterday. She made some remark as Erin entered, at which the little girls burst into shrill laughter, looking at the new arrival, and giggling in a way which would have disconcerted anyone less scornful. But Erin walked across the room, taking a vacant place at the side of the table, and watching Mademoiselle Berthe in some astonishment. Mademoiselle Berthe had turned out the contents of the sugar-bowl on the table, and was busily engaged in counting the lumps, taking up each one in her fingers, which were, as Erin remarked, not particularly clean. The result did not appear to be satisfactory; sweeping all the lumps together, she replaced them in the sugar-bowl, calling meanwhile loudly for "Katrine."

A very dirty servant-girl answered the summons, and an angry colloquy ensued. Erin did not, of course, understand what passed, but gathered from looks and gestures that the girl was defending herself from the accusation of having stolen some of the sugar. Finally, Katrine retired in tears, and Mademoiselle Berthe proceeded to give the pupils their breakfast.

"Bénissez Seigneur la nourriture que nous allons prendre Marie Veringen donnez votre tasse," she said, all in a breath, setting to work, without delay, to fill the girls' cups with very weak *café-au-lait.* Erin, indignant at the scene which had just taken place, and disgusted with the woman's dirty ways, drew away hers quickly as she was about to put in the sugar—"I don't want any, thanks!" she said quickly.

Mademoiselle Berthe's little eyes looked at her angrily. Erin spoke in English, but there was no mistaking her contemptuous tone and manner. This

long-legged Irish girl, who had arrived with not already too good recommendations, was going to give herself airs, was she? Hé—hé! they would see!

Mademoiselle Desmanet did not come down to the first breakfast; she was too delicate, she said. One would not have supposed it to look at her, certainly, and her appetite at the mid-day repast left nothing to be desired. She toyed with her soup, however, for some time before beginning to eat it; and presently Erin remarked that the fluid which, like that of the rest partaken of by the company, had been originally of the most pallid complexion, gradually assumed a deep amber hue. As this operation took place every day, with invariably the same result, her pupils inferred that there was some foreign substance—meat essence, probably—beneath the inverted bowl of the spoon, which rendered the decoction a little more palatable to mademoiselle. The stringy meat and greasy vegetables, which were considered good enough for Mademoiselle Berthe and the school-girls, were, moreover, supplemented by a little dish of some kind or the other, which it was hoped would tempt the delicate appetite of the head of the house. Mademoiselle Berthe invariably pressed her to eat it, if only for her sake and that of the little ones depending on her; and mademoiselle, after a little playful deprecation of the unnecessary extravagance, kindly suffered herself to be persuaded. Mademoiselle Berthe, sour and peevish with everyone else, was her devoted slave, whether through motives of affection or interest Erin never could discover; but she submitted uncomplainingly to all her caprices, and swallowed her snubs and ill-tempered rebukes as submissively as she disposed of the gristly beef.

Erin had not been a week in the house before she cordially hated Mademoiselle Berthe, despising her all the more for her servile attachment to her chief. About Mademoiselle Desmanet she was not so sure. She was, to begin with, a very clever woman; and the girl, as we know, respected and admired cleverness, even in those she most disliked. Then, Mademoiselle could be good-natured when it suited her—and it generally did suit her to be good-natured with her pupils, Mademoiselle Berthe being a safe, and always handy, butt for her ill-temper. There were occasional exceptions to this rule: as once, when Marie Veringen complained to her papa of having had nothing but sausages for dinner—the spirit of dissatisfaction being punished by cold looks and sarcastic innuendoes for weeks afterwards. But, as a rule, mademoiselle was lavish in caresses and expressions of endearment; and it was a pleasure to see her round, jolly face wreath itself with smiles as she entered the class-room, and to hear her cheery voice as she invited "her darlings" to set themselves to work. Erin did not require to be told twice, and made rapid progress in French, and also in all the other branches of education taught in the establishment. It must be conceded to Mademoiselle Desmanet that she had secured a very efficient staff of professors, under whose tuition Erin soon distanced all her fellow-pupils. Besides the boarders, who were few in number — and, for the most part, quite little children—there were several day-scholars of different nationalities; though, curiously enough, notwithstanding the terms of the prospectus, the classes did not at first include a single English girl.

One day, however, after Erin had been nearly

three months at the school, she was struck by the subdued commotion and excitement which everywhere prevailed. Katrine had been at work since early morning, scrubbing and polishing, and had washed her face and donned her Sunday dress before eleven o'clock; Mademoiselle Desmanet had frizzled the little locks on her forehead, and wore her best black silk and her cameo brooch. But this was not all. Dinner was postponed for half-an-hour, and, on entering the dining-room, the pupils were astounded at the festive appearance of the table. There was a clean cloth, napkins — generally condemned as superfluous—a leg of mutton, instead of the usual nondescript cut of meat, a pudding and a fruit tart. What could it mean! Never in the memory of the establishment had such a meal been spread.

"Shall I begin to carve, do you think?" asked mademoiselle, in excited tones, of her subordinate.

"Yes—it would look better if they were all at work. Now, mesdemoiselles, eat slowly, I pray you. Do not throw yourselves upon your plates as if you were famished."

"I have a mind to wait a little," said mademoiselle. "They will be here soon now, and the joint looks so much better before it is cut."

Many of the little girls, whose eyes had been fixed on the unwonted treat with an expression of great eagerness, looked at each other in disappointment.

"But it will get cold, that," said the incorrigible Marie Veringen, pointing a stumpy finger at the mutton.

"Ah, la vilaine petite fille!" began Mademoiselle Berthe, administering a sharp rap to the finger in question.

"The carriage, the carriage!" screamed Mademoiselle Desmanet, as a vehicle suddenly drew up to the door. "Marie Veringen, if you cry, I will give it to you later on. There," turning furiously to Mademoiselle Berthe, "it is just like you to spoil everything at the last moment! Marie, my little angel, dry your eyes, and you shall have a piece of gingerbread—such a piece of gingerbread! *C'est ca* —a little smile, then! Mademoiselle Berthe, for the love of God, collect your wits! Pass the children's plates, then, while I carve."

Outside, in the narrow street, stood a handsome carriage, from which descended a tall, imposing-looking lady, and a girl of about Erin's age. There was a short parley in the hall, and presently, Katrine, flinging open the dining-room door, announced "La-die Twee-dale."

"*Bon jour, chère* Lady Th-ve-dell," cried mademoiselle, rising, full of graceful confusion. "I am desolated that the servant should have shown you into this room. A thousand pardons! And you, too, dear Mees Joan, pray excuse the mistake. You find us *en famille*, just about to begin our simple repast. Very simple, as you see, dear madam—just a little gigot, very tender, very carefully cooked—a pudding —oh, I hold to a pudding—and a fruit tart. In our modest establishment, we cannot afford to give our dear children anything very *recherché*. Simple food, plain, but of the best quality—this is what we set before them. Very different, I fear, dear mademoiselle, from what *you* have been accustomed to; but we do our best."

"Plain, wholesome food is the best for children," said Lady Tweedale; she had a low-pitched voice, of

charming quality, and spoke a little slowly, but in good French.

"Are these the girls?" asked her daughter, in English, looking round with rather a dismal glance. "Mamma, do ask if there are any English girls?"

"Unfortunately, no, dear Lady Th-vee-dell; we have no English young ladies here at present—quite an unusual thing; for, generally, I have many English pupils. We have, among our *externes*, the daughter of the Baron de Sancy, who speaks English well, and here is little Marguerite de Lima, whose father is a——"

"Are there no English?" asked the girl, who had been eagerly watching her face.

"Ah, I was forgetting—*mon Dieu!* how stupid I am! There is Mees Th—Feetz-ger-ald. Approach, then, Irène, and give the hand to your compatriot."

Erin rose and came forward, unwillingly enough; her new acquaintance, whose eyes shone with pleasure, grasped her hand warmly. She was taller than Erin, and very slender, with a mane of fair hair hanging over her shoulders, blue eyes, and a small, sunburnt face. Erin looked suspiciously at her, noting the little aquiline nose, the carriage of the head, a certain high-born air; and then, suffering her eyes to wander over the pretty dress which, though simple enough, had a distinction of its own, "A compatriot, indeed!" she thought. "This is an English aristocrat." Whereupon, without saying a single word, she dropped the newcomer's hand and stalked back to her seat.

Mademoiselle, with a parting injunction to her *mignonnes* to eat well during her absence, conducted her visitors to another room, and after a somewhat lengthy interview, they took their leave. Erin watched the smart carriage, with its fine horses and

unmistakably British servants, as it rattled down the street. These were English people—the first she had ever seen—these were the people who had conquered and ruined Ireland; who, for seven centuries, had scorned and trampled on her native land. Come what would, she would never be friends with that girl.

Mademoiselle returned in high good-humour.

"It is arranged," she remarked, dropping into her chair. "Everything most satisfactory. If the girl likes being here, we may count on her for several winters. Imagine to yourself that they have come to Brussels only for her—they have heard the education is good, and they think the place is healthy, and so—they leave their magnificent chateau in the north of England, and establish themselves here."

"It is a chance for us—but I wonder that they should send her, even as day-scholar, a spoilt child like her!" observed Mademoiselle Berthe.

"They think she wants companionship," returned the other. "An only child, you know—yes, and a spoilt child, as you say; but, *enfin!* it does not concern us. Give me some mutton, then; I die of hunger. Ah, *ca*, those children have eaten nicely! Marie Veringen, you cannot have a third helping—no, it is really too much. Well, Mees Irène Feetz-ger-ald, these are pretty manners that you have! Is it like that that you welcome a charming compatriot?"

"She is no compatriot of mine," said Erin, "and I do not want her friendship."

"Ah, you do not want her friendship, and she is not your compatriot?" repeated mademoiselle, laying down her knife and fork and turning very red. "But when I tell you that she is, little badly-brought-up girl! and that I wish you to be much together—what then?"

Erin shrugged her shoulders.

"Friendship is not forced," she said.

A sharp passage-at-arms ensued, which not only led to many angry words on both sides, but procured for Erin the subsequent ill-will of both heads of the establishment.

And yet, curiously enough, Joan Tweedale had not been a month at the school before Erin and she were tenderly attached to each other. Mademoiselle's determination to throw them together had at first caused a good deal of pain and irritation to both girls. The more Erin held aloof, the more resolved did the Frenchwoman become to conquer the obstinacy which might possibly deprive her of her most valued pupil. Lectures were followed by threats, threats by punishments; and it was Joan's indignant protest against the latter which first won Erin's heart. Erin, condemned to solitary confinement for having refused to speak to "her compatriot" during recreation, overheard Miss Tweedale delivering a vehement harangue, occasionally interrupted by sobs, to the head of the establishment, defending Erin's liberties of thought and action as passionately as she would have done herself, and finally announcing that she would not stay another hour in a house where such injustice was perpetrated.

The result was unexpected. Erin, sent for to be embraced and forgiven—for mademoiselle had declared herself touched to the heart by Joan's generosity—came rushing out of her room, flounced past her mistress, and flung her arms round the English girl's neck.

"I heard what you said," she cried. "Forgive me, I 'll be your friend now. I think—you must have some Irish blood in you, or you wouldn't be so warm-hearted."

PART II

"HARVEST"

CHAPTER I

STRANGE NEWS

"MADEMOISELLE IRÈNE, mademoiselle sends you word that there is a gentleman in the drawing-room asking to see you."

It was a servant who spoke in tones of subdued excitement. All the little pupils raised their heads eagerly. Many relays of them had come and gone during Erin's four years' residence at the place, but these were most of them of the same type and the same character as their predecessors. Marie Veringen had left long ago, but that little flat-faced girl yonder might have been Marie Veringen's twin-sister, and possessed the same power of drawing down the wrath of the authorities on herself on every conceivable occasion.

"La, la," said Marie Veringen's double, with a derisive grin, "un monsieur pour mademoiselle!"

"*Ca*, get up then, Irène! make haste," cried Mademoiselle Berthe. "Are these young ladies to be kept all day from their work because you do not choose to hurry yourself?"

Erin laid down her book and rose, trembling a little, and turning pale.

She looked strangely out of place in that shabby room among those little girls. She was a tall maiden now—not so tall, perhaps, as she had promised to be in her childhood, but if she had not fulfilled her promise of unusual height, she had more than carried out her early indications of unusual beauty. Mademoiselle frequently upbraided her because people who passed her in the street turned round to look after her; but, in truth, it was difficult for anyone who saw her to refrain from a second glance. And yet, of what avail to her was so much beauty? In her position it was distinctly a disadvantage. She had known now for some time, and Mademoiselle Desmanet had taken care that everyone in the house should know too, that she was to make her own way in the world, and that the education she was in process of receiving was to be her future stock-in-trade. This education would shortly be terminated, and when her eighteenth year was completed, she must begin to work for her living. Her uncle had sent her one of his rare letters to remind her of the fact but a week previously—what, then, was the meaning of this unexpected visit? "The gentleman" could, of course, be no one else. Was he going to take her away at once—to take her away from Joan? Joan, her only friend, to whom all the love of her young heart was given? Must she leave her now, and go out into the wide world?

But she found Mademoiselle Desmanet bestowing her sweetest smiles and her choicest English on a man who was a perfect stranger to her. A tall iron-grey man, with a business-like aspect and a dry manner. He introduced himself as Mr Kennedy, a lawyer from Dublin.

"You may have heard your uncle speak of me," he added. "I was his man of business."

Erin shook her head. He continued, after a short pause.

"You are aware, I presume, of the sad event which has taken place at Glenmor. No?" as she looked up in surprise. "Dear me, I understood that the news had been broken to you. But everyone seems to have lost their heads since it happened. Well, Miss Fitzgerald"—clearing his throat—"I am afraid I must ask you to prepare to hear rather bad news about your uncle. Very bad news, I may say. He is—in point of fact, your uncle is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Erin, in a low voice. The shock was so great that she turned white to the very lips, and would have fallen had not mademoiselle hastily pushed her into a chair.

"Dead, *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed mademoiselle, wringing her hands, "what a misfortune! My poor, dear child! Thank heaven," she added to herself, "that the last trimestre was paid in advance!"

"It will appear a curious thing to you, Miss Fitzgerald, knowing how exact and—ahem! careful about money your uncle was, that he should have made no will. But such is the fact. To the very last he resisted the representations of our firm that at his age, and with his large property, it was his positive duty to arrange for the disposal of it. But he invariably refused. Later on there would be time enough, he would say—he had not yet made up his mind as to the bestowal of it. However, as his death occurred unexpectedly—he was found dead in his chair on Monday morning," added Mr Kennedy, casually; "the result has been such as we frequently fore-

told to Mr Fitzgerald. He died intestate, and the whole of the property, which we believe it was his intention to bequeath to different public institutions, has, in consequence, reverted to you as his nearest of kin. We have made strict search on the chance of his having made a will without consulting us, but none such is to be found; therefore, as matters stand, you are sole heiress of your uncle's very considerable wealth."

Erin heard as though in a dream: continuing to watch Mr Kennedy's face even when he had ceased to speak.

She was recalled to herself by mademoiselle, who came gracefully sidling across the room to fold her in her arms and drop a tear upon her brow—a very small tear, which mademoiselle had had some difficulty in producing.

"Behold her quite *impressionée*!" exclaimed mademoiselle. "Ah, my little one! daughter of my heart! how I rejoice at your good fortune! With what profound satisfaction do I now reflect on the fidelity with which I accomplished my duty towards you, upon whom I looked as a penniless orphan—on the tenderness, the maternal affection I lavished on you. Ah! my cherished child, permit me to congratulate you—to embrace you——"

"To congratulate me!" cried Erin, suddenly disengaging herself, and rising hastily. "But my uncle is dead!"

"She is going to pretend she is sorry," said mademoiselle to herself. "Is she cunning, that little one!"

Meanwhile, the lawyer, as much puzzled by Erin's attitude as by mademoiselle's gesticulations and

torrent of eager French, stood looking from one to the other, and was relieved when the girl said at last in English:

"I don't understand—how can the money be mine if my uncle did not intend me to have it?"

"My dear Miss Fitzgerald, have no misgivings on that point. You should, no doubt, by right have inherited the property in any case; but your uncle was, as you know—eccentric in some ways, and if he had carried out his intention, there would probably have been what I cannot help calling a perversion of justice. Things are far better as they are. The property *is* yours beyond all doubt, and you must accept it and its attending responsibilities whether you like it or not."

"And is it very considerable, monsieur?" asked mademoiselle, who had been listening attentively, and who now interposed with her head on one side, and her tongue well protruded in preparation for sustaining an English conversation.

"Yes, very considerable indeed. In these days, few men in Ireland possess such a property."

Mademoiselle sidled nearer to Erin, and evinced symptoms of a renewed desire to fall upon her neck; but Erin moved away, and she was obliged to content herself with languishing glances, and the murmured announcement that she had always idolised that child.

"Can I go back to Ireland at once, then?" asked Erin, after a short pause.

Mr Kennedy looked a little taken aback. "Where would you go? You have no relations or friends, I believe?"

"Couldn't I live at Glenmor with Martha?"

"I think that would hardly do," said the lawyer. "However, the decision does not rest with me. Being under age, you will probably be made a ward in Chancery, and the Lord Chancellor will appoint a guardian for you. Have you any friends with whom you could confer, and who would advise you with regard to your future?"

"There is Joan," cried Erin eagerly. "And I daresay Sir Edward would be a good person to consult."

"Sir Edward?" echoed Mr Kennedy, interrogatively. He had caught at the name.

"Sir Edward Tweedale," said Erin; "he has always been kind to me, and is the father of my greatest friend. But he is rather a great man. He might not care to be bothered about me."

"He is a great man, is he?" said Mr Kennedy, who was gradually getting less and less starched. "Well, you are a very important person, too. Pray, talk over the matter with your friends, Miss Fitzgerald, and I will call upon Sir Edward Tweedale this afternoon. Do I understand you to say he is actually in Brussels now?"

Erin, with some misgivings, gave his address, and Mr Kennedy departed, leaving the girl still in a state of bewilderment, and Mademoiselle Desmanet fluttered and aggrieved.

"There is one friend whom you did not mention, Irène, and who would have rejoiced if permitted to continue to lavish her tender solicitude upon an adored pupil. In me," cried Mademoiselle, tapping her bosom impressively, "you would have found a friend, a mother, one who would willingly have made any sacrifice for the privilege of covering with her wings the nestling of her love."

Here Mademoiselle extended her arms with a little flapping movement, doubtless intended as an invitation.

Erin did not respond, however, except by a brief request to be allowed to visit the Tweedales without delay.

"I will myself conduct you," said her former instructress, stifling her rising indignation, and clinging still to the forlorn hope that the change in Erin's fortunes would benefit her own. She held forth in the same affectionate strain until they reached the Tweedales' large house in the Avenue Louise, before the *porte cochère* of which she paused.

"I leave you here, my dear little one. Do not press me to enter. No, I assure you, I have too much delicacy to wish to intrude upon your counsels." She paused with an expectant air; but her intention of withdrawing coincided too exactly with Erin's own wishes for her to gainsay her, and when the door opened, Mademoiselle was reluctantly obliged to retire, observing, with a sigh, that she supposed Lady Tweedale would have the amiability to send someone to reconduct her young friend when she wished to return.

Joan Tweedale had attended Mademoiselle's classes irregularly of late, and then simply as an excuse for meeting her adored Erin. The friendship which had sprung up between them was more deep and true than ordinary girlish affections. It was not in Erin's nature to do anything by halves, and the English girl was in her own way quite as thorough. She had, till coming to Brussels, lived a somewhat lonely life—always in the country and in the society of older people. This new friendship, therefore, the young

companionship, the constant contact with a nature all the more fascinating to her because so unlike her own, had effected quite a revolution in Joan's life. Her parents, simple-minded and devoted people, who lived solely and entirely for her, congratulated themselves on the girl's evident happiness and the rapid development of hitherto dormant faculties. They were too single-hearted to be jealous, and "Joan's friend" was made almost as welcome to the Tweedale fireside as Joan herself. Whenever, at the latter's instance, mademoiselle gave Erin a holiday, there was jubilation in the household, and everyone, from Sir Edward himself to Alphonse the little page-boy, received her with a smile. Of late the friends had not met quite so frequently: Erin was working very hard to fit herself for her future career, and it was supposed that Joan would "come out in a sort of way" during the ensuing winter—the last the Tweedales would spend in Brussels. Lady Tweedale thought it a pity she should not go a little into society as she was in the place, especially as they could not afford to give her a season in town till the following year. Times were bad, as Sir Edward said, many of the farmers at home did not pay up, and the move to Fletewood in the spring, and setting up the establishment afresh, would cost a pretty penny. Besides, they *must* get the Hall repainted this year, and—after all, Joan was young enough. Lady Tweedale acquiesced. She would like Joan to make her début with due brilliancy, and it was better to wait a little longer than go in for the thing by halves. Meanwhile, it would be good for the child to go out a little, as they *were* to be another winter in Brussels—it did not matter so much *there*

how they did things, and they could continue to economise all the time.

The Tweedales were supposed to be economising in Brussels, and Lady Tweedale thought they were making very great efforts indeed. They kept one housemaid instead of three, for instance, while a page replaced the second footman, and there was only one maid in the kitchen besides the cook. What more, as her ladyship would occasionally observe a little plaintively, what more could they do? The absolute necessaries of life alone remained to them. The carriage, for instance, could not be done without; but they had only brought one pair of horses with them, besides the cob on which Sir Edward took exercise somewhat dolefully every morning. He felt the separation from home very acutely, but endeavoured to lessen it by paying flying bachelor visits there occasionally; and consoled himself with the thought that it was for Joan's sake. The work of education had been progressing all these years that they had been living so quietly; the child appeared happier than she had ever been in her life.

Erin ran up the stairs with the freedom of long custom, and entered the drawing-room unannounced. Lady Tweedale was reading the *Indépendance Belge*, her eyebrows slightly elevated, and the very angle assumed by her aquiline nose denoting condemnation of the principles set forth in that journal. Joan was engraving on wood. Her table was established in the window as far as possible from the blazing wood fire —Lady Tweedale was a chilly person, and Joan was the reverse—there was a fine litter all round her of tools and papers, and tiny curled shavings. Joan herself, with a kind of pinafore over her pretty dress,

and her hair plaited in one thick tress, which occasionally tumbled over her shoulder and was impatiently jerked back, looked no more like a semi-débutante—Lady Tweedale would never acknowledge her daughter's participations in the gaieties of Brussels as more than "coming out in a kind of way"—than her special corner of the drawing-room was in keeping with the rest.

She gave a joyful little scream as Erin entered, but without rising or looking up.

"I knew it was your step—wait, wait, wait,"—as her friend approached after greeting Lady Tweedale —"I'm just at a very ticklish bit. Look—there's the first proof on the table there—I pulled it off just now. What do you think of it?"

Erin obediently examined the smeared page, and endeavoured to trace a design in the sticky black mess in the middle. Wood-engraving was Joan's latest hobby, and she had not always patience to wait till the block took shape before "pulling off" a proof to see how it was getting on.

"You are improving very much," remarked Erin. "Those trees seem to be coming out very well."

"Trees!" exclaimed Joan, dropping her tool and looking up with a dismayed laugh. "They are mountains, my darling. You don't mean to say they look like trees. I've only just outlined them, of course—but still—they shouldn't look like trees! Dear me, this *is* a blow! Come and kiss me now if you like, and do look at this dear little block. I'm dying to get it finished, but it won't be done for ages yet. All this sky has to be blocked out, and the mountains cross-hatched—do you know what that means? Aha! I thought you didn't. Well, when

they are cross-hatched, perhaps they won't look so much like trees. There, now—I 'll put it away and talk to you. What *is* the matter, Erin?"—with a sudden change of tone—"you don't look well, and —I know there is something wrong."

"Come to the fire, dear," said Lady Tweedale, taking off her pince-nez, and laying down her paper. "Come and get warm and tell us all about it. Has mademoiselle been unkind again?"

"Or have you had another letter from your horrid old uncle?" put in Joan.

"Oh hush, Joan!" cried Erin, beginning to sob. "He is dead!"

"Dear me!" said Lady Tweedale uncrossing her pretty little feet, and patting Erin's shoulder commiseratingly with her small plump hand. "Dead! you don't say so."

Joan turned very red, and clasped Erin's hand with both hers, and presently began to hug and kiss her—which was her way of expressing surprise and condolence. Mr Fitzgerald had been a horrid old man, but still Erin's uncle—and now she was alone in the world.

"And what will become of you, my poor dear child?" said Lady Tweedale, in her soft cooing tones, and continuing the patting process.

"I don't know," sobbed Erin. "I 'm—I 'm to have all his money, I believe. He didn't mean to leave it to me, but he made no will, and so——"

"Well, my very dear girl, I am exceedingly glad to hear it," said her ladyship, sitting up and taking both feet off the fender in her eagerness. "It has been a great shock to you, of course—but still—things might have been worse. There now, don't

cry any more. It is a mercy that your uncle was providentially prevented from carrying out this final act of injustice—far better for his own soul, poor man," she added piously. "We must pray for him —I daresay he wasn't quite accountable. Well, but now, dear," settling down among her cushions again —"now, what about your future? Have you any plans—what do you propose to do?"

Erin related what Mr Kennedy had said, and presently Joan jumped up and clapped her hands. "I have it—I have it! Papa must be your guardian, and you shall live with us. Do you hear, mamma? And isn't it a good idea? The Lord Chancellor must make papa Erin's guardian, and we'll take her back with us to Fletewood in the spring. Joy, joy!"

Joan was spinning about the room, her fair pig-tail flying, and her pinafore "ballooning" as she twirled.

"Hurray! now I don't care two pins about leaving Brussels! Erin, *do* get up and cut a caper or two. Never mind about your uncle. Think of *me*!"

Erin got up but did not cut any capers. She stood still, with a shy, hesitating smile, and blushed very much. Lady Tweedale looked a little startled, but indulgent, and, on the whole, pleased. She was very fond of Erin, and Joan was the apple of her eye.

"We must see if it can be managed," she said. "It will be charming if it can be arranged."

"Oh, but it shall be managed—I've settled it all!" cried Joan. "I'll beard the Lord Chancellor in his den if necessary. I'll go and prepare papa now. When does that lawyer-man come?"

"Some time this afternoon," answered Erin.

"*We'll* be ready for him!" said Joan, and vanished.

CHAPTER II

ERIN A LANDLORD

"WHAT woman wills, God wills," we are told, and when "woman" in question happens to be an only child who has had her own way from the moment she was capable of formulating it, the result is a foregone conclusion. It was perhaps the less remarkable in this instance that Joan's plan happened to fall in very nicely with the wishes of all concerned. Sir Edward and Lady Tweedale were happy to coincide with an arrangement which gave their daughter so much pleasure, and it was so evidently to Erin's advantage, that the consent of the authorities was readily obtained. Financial arrangements were concluded to the satisfaction of all parties, and Erin soon found herself an inmate of the Tweedale establishment, with the prospect of continuing to belong to it for at least three years.

"Unless you marry meanwhile, you know," observed Joan, as she discussed the matter with Erin on the night of her arrival.

"I never shall," returned her friend positively, "I have got other things to do with my life."

"Well, I suppose I shall have to marry sometime," said Joan pensively. "Papa will want me to. Never mind—don't let's talk of my husband, I daresay he will be a stupid fellow. Most men are. I don't much care for young men—at least, not those I've

seen hitherto. Of course they have chiefly been Belgians, and they don't count."

"Well, I have never known any young men at all," replied Erin, laughing, "except—oh yes, I did meet one man when I was a little girl, but I only spoke to him for a short time. He seemed nice and not at all stupid. And he was very kind to me."

She stopped, a curious sort of reserve making her feel disinclined to pursue the subject even with Joan. She had never forgotten her fellow-traveller, and used occasionally to hope that some time, somehow, she would meet him again. The world was such a small place, after all. Perhaps they might come across each other, when she had been able to carry out some of her long-dreamt-of projects. He had said he wondered what she would do with her life, and that he would like to watch her career from afar—she would like to show him that she was capable of great things.

"I have all sorts of plans," she resumed dreamily. "As soon as I am of age, I shall go to Ireland—and find plenty of work there. I mean to devote my life to the Irish people. I used to think that when I had made just enough money to start with, I would try to get on the staff of some newspaper."

"Yes, but you cannot do anything of that kind now. You are a great heiress, you know—much more of an heiress than I am. Why, you are a landlord, Erin, do you know that? How funny it seems. You are actually one of those dreadful beings you used to hate so much."

Erin started and flushed—the matter had not struck her in that light before. She had been so full of plans for the regeneration of the Glenmor district, the amelioration of the condition of the peasantry by

means of her great wealth, that it had not occurred to her that the wealth itself was the result of her uncle's investments in land. Her income consisted entirely of rent—was composed, in fact, solely and exclusively of the earnings of the sons of the soil.

"Things are on a different footing now," she said, after a moment's pause. "I must look into them—there shall be no rack-rents on my property. I must get them reduced all round, and as for the really poor people—they shan't pay anything at all."

But Erin soon found how small a voice in her own concerns is permitted to a minor of eighteen. Her property was being "administered" for her by people competent to undertake the task—the rents did not appear to be unduly high, the peasantry were fairly prosperous, the recently-appointed agent was a man of integrity and experience; there was to be no question of lowering the rents under existing circumstances, and as for forgiving Tim Hoolahan a couple of "gales" because his wife Biddy happened to be a favourite of the new proprietress, the idea was not to be thought of. Erin was treated by those in authority with great consideration, but her appeals were entirely ignored. She was informed deferentially that she might rely on her affairs being managed for the best in every possible way; and with much respectful patting on the back, it was conveyed to her that she would do well not to trouble herself about the matter.

Sir Edward was merely guardian to her person, and administrator of the funds allowed for her private expenses, and did not interfere in any way with the management of her estate. He refused, moreover, so persistently to fall in with Erin's views that they very nearly quarrelled over it.

"Let 'em alone, my dear," he would observe, when the girl fumed over her powerlessness. "Let 'em settle it among 'em. All the better for you if they do screw the lazy chaps up a bit. Why, they'd impose on you, my little girl! I've no doubt the agent over there understands how to deal with them far better than you or I should."

"But I don't want them to be screwed up," cried Erin, with a little furious stamp of her foot. "Nobody knows the people so well as I do—and they are my people, and it is my money—oh, why can't I do what I like!"

"Because it would not be good for you, my dear," returned Sir Edward. "What a little spitfire it is! Joan, you'll have to lecture her. I wish someone would screw up my people for me, I know they are getting more and more behindhand; and they want more and more out of me. I declare I can't get my own work done. Morris wrote yesterday to say I couldn't have the carpenter for another week or two because they were repairing some barns in the village. I like that! In former days the farmers used to do those little jobs for themselves—but now, thank ye! they won't do a hand's turn. I must send my man to do any little tuppeny-ha'penny things for 'em. And Morris encourages 'em—Morris is so soft."

Once embarked on his favourite grievance—the shortcomings of his bailiff—Sir Edward's eloquence was not easily checked, and Erin's trouble became a matter of secondary importance.

After many futile efforts to assert herself, she was obliged to submit to the existing condition of things, and to content herself with making plans for the time when she should be her own mistress; meanwhile,

sending substantial money aid to the most poverty-stricken of the Glenmor tenantry.

Joan, during this time, was going out "in a sort of way," and seemed to enjoy it, though at first she had rebelled against being obliged to put up her hair, and being laced into tight ball-dresses. She loved dancing, however, and her delight in it consoled her for much, even for the inanities which a Belgian young man reserves for a young girl. He can be gay and lively—on occasion a little too lively—with a married woman; but with girls, not Mrs General herself could be more strict in confining herself to conversation of the "prunes and prism" order.

"It is very cold, mademoiselle, but it will be colder at the New Year. We shall probably have snow. But we are at least spared the fogs of your country. Are you fond of dancing, mademoiselle? Shall we have another turn? Shall I now reconduct you to madame, your mother?"

"And then comes the duck of the head and the click of the heels," Joan would say, rehearsing it for Erin. "'*En vous remerciant, mademoiselle!*' There! that is the extent of my partner's conversation. Five out of seven of them to-night made that remark about the fogs. If it wasn't that they really do dance well, I should be bored to death. If you would come with me, Erin, it would be much more fun—we could compare notes, you know; but I suppose you won't?" wistfully.

Erin shook her head, and Joan did not press the point; her friend's mourning was too recent, and, besides, she was firm in averring her resolve to shun frivolous society.

But one day, about three months after Mr Fitz-

gerald's death, Lady Tweedale suddenly asserted herself. A card had come for a fancy dress ball at the English Minister's—all Brussels was fighting for invitations, the English Colony proper—a small and not particularly select assembly of Britons, who had most of them forsaken their mother-land under rather peculiar circumstances, was left out—but nearly every Belgian family of distinction was included. The Tweedales, who were careful to keep themselves aloof from their compatriots, had received cards for themselves "and party," and of this party Lady Tweedale was determined that Erin should form one. It was absurd for her to plead her recent bereavement—people did not mourn so long in these days, and besides, really, as Lady Tweedale delicately insinuated, "'Circumstances did alter cases.' Your affection for your uncle, my poor, dear child, cannot have been altogether overpowering. Besides, it will be a curious and pretty sight worth going to. You will be quiet enough when we go to Fletewood next month. Joan will enjoy it fifty times as much if you are with her; and—altogether," said Lady Tweedale, with a little touch of kindly imperiousness, "altogether, my dear, I wish you to go."

"Do go, Erin darling," pleaded Joan. "You shall have a dress all over with shamrocks, if you like, and carry a green flag in one hand and a harp in the other."

Erin smiled. The idea rather took her fancy, and she told Lady Tweedale that this time she would not refuse. The latter was enchanted.

"I shall write to Mark to-day," she said. "You have heard us speak of my nephew, Mark Wimbourne, Erin, dear. It is really absolutely necessary to have a young man of one's own on these occasions.

I suppose there would be no use whatever in trying to get the Godfreys to run over, Joan; Poppy would enjoy it, but Godfrey would never give up his hunting —the Godfrey Tweedales, you know, Erin—Godfrey will succeed his uncle some day—I hope a very remote one—as that stupid child there had not the sense to be a boy. Poppy, his wife, is an American, such a pretty creature—she would have been an addition to our party—but I am sure nothing would induce Godfrey to leave Leicestershire now. We must just content ourselves with Mark. We are leaving so soon that it would not be worth while trying to get anyone else. You can't ask your friends to run over for a night or two to Brussels. Well, girls, what shall we wear? I know what I shall do. I shall just hunt up my old drawing-room train—it is only four years since I presented Poppy, so it is not so very shabby—and go *poudrée*. And you, Joan; what will you be?"

"Shall I go as something artistic, or something horsey?" said Joan meditatively. "My personal wishes are divided pretty equally between the two. It would be a nuisance to carry about a palette and brushes all night; otherwise, there is rather a pretty dress, you know, representing a palette with dabs of different colours all round—but without the brushes in your hand it's not convincing. Couldn't I have a little jockey cap and vest—Godfrey's colours?"

"And how would you manage about the rest of your costume, my dear?" inquired her mother, soberly.

"That would be a little difficult I must own. I know—I shall go as a *chasseresse*—you know —three-cornered hat, green velvet coat with big lapels, and then a skirt of some kind or other."

"The skirt appears to be a matter of detail," observed Lady Tweedale. "Well, Erin, dear, now for you. Pray, do not let us have anything too patriotic. I really could not chaperone a green flag and shamrocks."

Erin flushed and frowned a little, not altogether liking her ladyship's tone, nor the comfortable chuckle with which she now regarded her. She had not, of course, quite decided in impersonating Ireland; but still, it was not such a preposterous idea as Lady Tweedale seemed to think. After all, *qu'allait elle faire dans cette galère?* She had half a mind to give up the idea.

"There are so many pretty dresses to choose from, you know," pursued Lady Tweedale, affecting not to notice her annoyance. "Why not go as a shepherdess, for instance, or a Spanish girl, or a Swiss peasant? Any of these would suit you."

"If I go at all, I shall go as an Irish girl," returned Erin, rather pettishly. "But I really think I should be out of my element altogether. I can't dance to begin with, and——"

"I 'll teach you," cried Joan; "and we 'll get Madame Deport to finish you off. No, you can't get out of it, you can't break your word now. The dear touchy thing! It shall go as an Irish girl if it likes—an Irish peasant girl. What is really the national costume?"

"Generally rags," said Lady Tweedale; "and if Erin wants to go in character, she had better have a dirty face and bare feet."

"Isn't mamma naughty to-day?" put in Joan, anticipating Erin's retort, for she saw that the latter was now really angry. "Mamma, if you don't behave better, we shall go away. First making base insinuations about my preference for manly

attire, and now attacking Erin on her tenderest point. You really must have more regard for our feelings."

Lady Tweedale smiled, and extended a hand to each in token of contrition.

"Seriously," continued Joan, "are not the peasants in the West of Ireland supposed to have a costume of some kind? A red cloak, isn't it, and a blue skirt?"

"Yes," said Erin, "I think so. I think their dresses are made of a sort of blue homespun material, and they do have red cloaks, I know, sometimes."

"Well, that would be rather pretty," said Lady Tweedale, who was anxious to atone for her incautious speech of a moment or two ago. "A blue skirt and a red cloak, do you say? Red suits Erin, too. We might make something of it."

Accordingly it was decided, to the satisfaction of all parties, that Erin was to go as a "Connemara peasant girl," and the costume ordered for her consisted of a short blue satin dress, and a scarlet velvet cloak, in which, as everyone declared, she looked the part to perfection.

Meanwhile, the expected arrival of Mr Mark Wimbourne caused no small excitement in the house; even Erin looked forward to it with some curiosity. He was so clever, she heard on all sides, and so amusing, added Joan, and such a dear, nice fellow, said Lady Tweedale.

"Sure to get on in the world," observed Sir Edward.

"If only he does not try for too many things," put in his wife.

"I'm afraid he *has* too many irons in the fire," observed Joan. "Let's see. Barrister to begin with—he doesn't practise, or whatever you call it; but he could if he chose. He ought to be success-

ful, I'm sure, he is so awfully sharp, and so quick to catch one tripping. I shouldn't like to be cross-examined by Mark, if I were a witness. Well, literary man next—writes for all the big reviews, I believe. They say he might make a very fine career out of journalism alone if he would stick to it."

"I must say I should be sorry if he sacrificed other interests to that," said Lady Tweedale plaintively. "Why should Mark be nothing better than a newspaper man?"

"Then," pursued Joan, disregarding the interruption, "Member of Parliament. He's our member, you know, Erin. That isn't exactly a paying concern, but I fancy he turns it to account in the long run, and it gratifies his own ambition, besides the satisfaction it gives to his relations—and his constituents, of course—to be represented by such a clever fellow."

"Yes," assented Sir Edward; "the world will hear of Mark some day, I fancy. His maiden speech attracted a good deal of attention two years ago, and his famous passage-of-arms with that ruffian made the House roar with laughter. Absolutely roar!" repeated Sir Edward, rubbing his hands and chuckling. "Ho! ho! Mark's a clever fellow—no doubt about *his* getting on."

"What side does he take in politics?" asked Erin suddenly.

"What side? The *right* side, my dear, you may be sure. If you don't want to be unmercifully chaffed, you will do well to keep your views on the subject of Home Rule to yourself while Mark is here."

"I am not in the least afraid of Mr Mark Wimbourne, thank you," returned Miss Fitzgerald loftily; but, nevertheless, she was a little disenchanted.

CHAPTER III

MARK WIMBOURNE

IT was dusk on a February afternoon when Mr Mark Wimbourne arrived. He appeared a little earlier than his relatives had expected, and as it happened, no one was at home except Erin.

The light of the fire alone guided the traveller across the room, and his feet fell noiselessly on the pile carpet. Erin, who was seated by the hearth absorbed in meditation, did not hear the door open, nor perceive his approach until he stood beside her.

His eyes had not yet become accustomed to the semi-darkness, and seeing a girl's figure dimly outlined in the ruddy glow, he took it to be Joan's.

"Well, my little cousin, how are you?" he cried cordially, stooping and clasping both her hands. "Grown-up and come out, but not much changed, I hope. Glad to see me?"

"I am sure Joan will be very glad to see you when she comes in," said Erin, withdrawing her hands and rising.

She did not ask herself where she had heard that voice before, because she recognised it instantaneously. Mr Mark Wimbourne and her well-remembered fellow-traveller were one and the same. She almost felt now as if she had expected this meeting, though, as a matter of fact, nothing had been farther from her thoughts. Would he remember her? she wondered.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr Wimbourne pleasantly. "It is so dark here, I took you for my cousin—but, of course, I know now who you are. Joan's friend, are you not? Miss Fitzgerald. You see I have heard of you—and as, of course, you know these good people expect me, we may consider ourselves introduced."

He stooped and drew the logs together, so that they shot forth a blaze which revealed the two to each other. His clean-shaven face was, perhaps, a little thinner, the lines a little firmer than when she had seen it four years before, but otherwise unchanged; she would have known it anywhere. She noticed, however, with some chagrin, and not a little disappointment, that in the steady gaze he bent on her, though there was a considerable amount of approval, and even admiration, there was absolutely no gleam of recognition.

"By-the-by, what has become of all my relations?" he asked presently; "it is very remiss of them not to be here to welcome me."

"They did not expect you so soon. Lady Tweedale and Joan are shopping, I think, and Sir Edward generally goes to the club at this time."

"Oh, does he?" responded Mr Wimbourne, with the air of profound interest which, as Erin remembered, he had displayed of old when her concerns were under discussion, and which rather annoyed her now when applied to such a trivial matter. She subsequently discovered that this attitude of his was invariable on receiving any piece of information whatever.

"Well," he pursued after a short pause, "I hope it won't bore you very much to entertain me till someone comes in. I should like some tea—and don't you

think we might have lights? I hate sitting in the dark."

Taking permission for granted, he rang the bell and gave his orders accordingly; and then, drawing his aunt's favourite chair close to the hearth, took possession of it, and calmly awaited events.

He evidently considered it part of Erin's duty as entertainer to make conversation for him. She had never felt so shy in her life. What was she to say to him? Other girls would know, but she was not like other girls—she began to wish now that she had not been so resolute in shunning society—no doubt it did make people stupid, and she did not want Mark Wimbourne to think her stupid.

He sat meanwhile in an attitude of tranquil expectancy, with his finger-tips lightly pressed together, and his eyes fixed on the fire.

"I hope you had a good passage," said Erin at haphazard.

"Thanks, yes—very fair. It was too short to trouble me much in any case."

"Then you did not come by the *Baron Osy*?"—surely this hint would remind him of his little fellow-traveller of old.

"The *Baron Osy*?"—blankly—"Oh, the Antwerp way—no"—with a little laugh, "Dover and Calais is quite good enough for me. One has about eighteen hours of it the other way, hasn't one?"

"Have you never tried it?" said Erin, and her voice trembled a little.

"Oh yes, once, I believe—years ago, when I was very young and had desperate ideas about economy. Are they going to bring that tea, do you think, or is it permissible to ring again? I know the ways

of my aunt's servants of old—they don't like to be hurried, and she would think it shocking to disturb them. But as she isn't here, I think we might venture to remind them that one's wants have not yet been attended to."

He rang as he spoke, and William, the English footman, appeared with the coal-box—his way of protesting against the visitor's uncalled-for impatience.

Neither Wimbourne nor Erin uttered a word of explanation, and William, having as nearly as possible extinguished the comfortably glowing logs under a rattling black avalanche, withdrew, leaving the occupants of the room in almost total darkness.

"We haven't improved matters," observed Mark, as the door closed. "I should have expected more moral courage from you. Why didn't you say what we rang for?"

"Why didn't *you*?" cried Erin. "You are Lady Tweedale's nephew, and have the best right."

"I 'm only a visitor, though. Now, you are a kind of daughter of the house. By-the-by, how does my uncle come to be your guardian?"

"I thought you said you knew all about me?"

"Only the bare facts of your being his ward. I want to hear the details,"—here there was a sound as of a chair being dragged across the floor.

"Well, there isn't much to tell. I—I—happen to have a good deal of money, and no relations, and *somebody* had to take care of me. And Joan was my greatest friend, and so——"

"And so *she* managed it, I suppose. How did you and Joan come across each other?"

Erin told him, speaking a little curtly in the

hope of putting an end to the discussion; but Mr Wimbourne was interested, or, at least, chose to appear interested, and continued to question her so adroitly that he learned rather more of her history than she really meant to tell him. Her past enthusiasms and future projects she was careful to keep to herself; but he heard something of her former life and curious education, and looked at her with renewed attention when lights were at last brought. But as soon as the tea-table was set forth, he turned his thoughts to other matters.

"Most interesting," he observed; "and now may I have some tea."

Erin poured it out, feeling intensely exasperated no less at the casual way in which he dropped the subject of her affairs, than at her own folly in having allowed him to discuss them.

The entrance of the Tweedales put an end to a *tête-à-tête*, which she was beginning to find embarrassing, and she took the first opportunity of escaping to her own room.

That episode of the past which had left so deep an impression on her mind, how completely he had forgotten it! Well, she would never pretend that *she* remembered. How glad she was now that she had obeyed the instinct which forbade her to dilate on it even to Joan. It was humiliating, too—should she ever forget his air of serene unconsciousness in alluding to his only journey from London to Antwerp. And she had been on the point of revealing her identity—thank Heaven she had refrained. So, Mr Mark Wimbourne, Joan's cousin, the rising barrister, the litterateur, the member of Parliament, and clever successful fellow all round, he was the

man of whom Erin had secretly made a little bit of a hero all these years. She had thought him a personage of some kind, and if he was not one yet, he seemed likely to become one. But the kindly, tender-hearted, generous youth, who had been so easily moved to compassion for the woes of a strange little girl, who had promised almost affectionately to take an interest in her future—where was he? There was no trace of him in Mark Wimbourne.

"And yet he must have a good heart under that artificial manner of his," she reflected, when her irritation calmed itself in some degree; "but it is a pity he is not sincere."

They were half-way through the soup when Sir Edward appeared. He was always late for meals, and unless in the case of a large dinner-party, nobody ever dreamed of waiting for him. He leisurely sauntered across the room now, devoutly saying grace aloud as he walked, according to his custom, oblivious of the fact that this religious ceremony had already been gone through by those assembled.

"Amen," said Sir Edward, cheerfully, pausing opposite Mark's chair. "Well, how is our future Prime Minister?"

Mark looked up, smiled, nodded, disposed of the spoonful of soup he had been in the act of conveying to his lips, and then half rose, extending his hand.

"How are you, Uncle Edward? Pretty fit? That's right."

"How does the Government get on without ye, eh?" pursued Sir Edward, stumping round to his seat. "Important man like you—I told her lady-

ship she oughtn't to interfere with the interests of the nation like that—taking you out of the country just when it's most in need of you p'raps."

"Oh, I think I can be spared for the time," responded his nephew imperturbably. "I 've paired for to-morrow night, and there's nothing else of any importance going on just now."

"Come, *that's* right," said the old baronet in the same elaborately bantering tone. "Otherwise, you know, we should have heavy consciences in dragging you away. It might lead to a national calamity, mighn't it? — what's this? Messy-looking stuff, whatever it is."

"Mutton cutlets *ar lar reform*, Sir Edward," returned the butler solemnly.

"Beastly messy-looking stuff! I wish you wouldn't have all those sauces, Adela. Hate the sight of 'em. No, thank ye. I'll wait for the next. Take that round to Mr Wimbourne. There's *Reform* for you, Mark, my boy—let's see how you'll fancy it. Well, what are they doing in the House just now?"

"Much the same as they've been doing all the Session—dawdling on and trying to throw a sop to Cerberus every now and then. You see the papers, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I see the papers — but I like when I have the opportunity to get my news from the fountainhead. Home Rule is done for, anyhow."

"In its present form—and for a time, yes; but it will crop up again before long. The General Election is coming on, you know."

"And what will happen then?" put in Erin suddenly, from the other side of the table.

"Well, if the Liberals get in, I suppose they would carry Home Rule somehow. But there is not much chance of it—we shall beat them out of the field."

"And how will your party deal with the Irish question?" pursued Erin aggressively, for his confident tone enraged her.

"I know how I should like to deal with it," said Mark, laughing. "I should serve out Maxim guns gratis to both sides of the National party, and let the Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites mow each other down at their leisure. In course of time the Unionists would have it all to themselves, and we should have a nice, loyal, peaceable little Ireland."

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Sir Edward. "Let 'em fight it out between 'em like the Kilkenny cats, eh? Just the sort of thing that would suit 'em, I should think. The Paddies' courage is apt to ooze away at the sight of a battlefield, but the Maxim guns would do their business nicely. Turn a handle and bring down a couple of hundred of their opponents from a safe distance, or be cut down themselves without knowing anything about it. A very bright idea, Mark: why don't you propose it to the House?"

Erin turned quite pale with anger and disgust. Good Heavens, were these civilised people! She looked from Sir Edward's genial, white-whiskered face to Mr Wimbourne's pale and refined one. The latter was peeling an apple, twirling the fruit in his long, slim fingers, and looking down at it with a composed smile. Of course he had spoken in joke, but some jokes were too atrocious to be perpetrated. The man must have a horrible mind who could even suggest such a thing. Erin's vivid imagination con-

jured up the scene of carnage—seeing whole rows—not of mere impersonal "Irishmen," but of the individual Pats, and Jims, and Micks, of her acquaintance—slaughtered, "mown down," by the diabolical weapons they could not see.

"The idea is not so original as you think," she cried, with angry sarcasm. "It is very, very old—in fact, it has always been the English idea of governing Ireland—to exterminate the bulk of the people, that the wretched slavish minority, who are not Irish at all, may have everything their own way."

Sir Edward stopped laughing—he was not particularly pleased at the girl's positive tone—and Lady Tweedale began to gather up her effects preparatory to leaving the room. It was quite absurd of a child like Erin to begin an argument with Mark—she would make a little goose of herself, and be sorry for it after. Joan tried to combine a warning glance at her cousin with a pleading one at Erin, and Mr Wimbourne looked up surprised, but amused.

"You have not quite entered into the spirit of the notion," he cried, addressing Erin, leisurely. "I don't at all propose that we English should exterminate the Irish—but merely that we should be generous enough to enable them to exterminate each other. That is where the brilliancy of the idea comes in—it would be cheap, simple, and efficient, besides being grateful to the Irish mind. Most of those patriots are thirsting for each other's blood—well, I should put them in the way of getting at it—that's all."

"Come along," cried Joan, jumping up and putting her arm through Erin's, "I know you and Mark will fight if you don't, and mamma has been fidgeting about for ages."

Lady Tweedale, however, reseated herself as the girls left the room, and addressed herself gently to her nephew.

"You must have patience with our little friend, Mark. Pray don't discuss politics with her—she is a rabid little Home Ruler, and it makes her so cross."

"I think she is most entertaining," cried Mark; "I like to see her in a rage. But how comes she to be so keen a Nationalist? I thought you said she had large property in Ireland?"

"That's just the joke," cried Sir Edward. "She is full of nonsensical notions about Ireland for the Irish, and the land of the people—and she's a landlord herself. Ha, ha, ha! Every penny she has in the world comes from land. I should like to know where she'd be if landlordism was abolished."

"Well, Edward dear, you must do her the justice to say that she would be quite willing to sacrifice herself for her principles—only, luckily, she has no power over herself at present, and we must hope that by the time she comes of age she will have more sense. You see, Mark, she has had such a curious bringing-up. Her father was a rebel, you know, actually transported for his conduct in the year '48, and he married an Irish peasant girl, and Erin was brought up to a great extent in a cabin —so one can't quite expect her to be like other people. Her very name prepares you for something a little extraordinary. Erin, you know. Her father insisted on calling her Erin. But she is a dear, sweet child, and we are all devoted to her, aren't we, Edward?"

"Yes," returned her lord. "She's a nice little thing, and very fond of Joan. We'll soon laugh the

nonsense out of her—and she'll see for herself that it doesn't pay."

"What a funny history," mused Wimbourne, rising and opening the door for his aunt. "The anti-climax is quite delicious."

Upstairs, Joan observed diffidently to her friend that she supposed she must not ask what she thought of Mark.

"Yes, you can ask," responded Erin briefly. "I don't in the least object to telling you—I hate him!"

CHAPTER IV

BABYLON

WHEN Mr Wimbourne presently accompanied his uncle to the drawing-room, he chose to exhibit himself in quite a different aspect. It pleased him to exert himself for the entertainment of the women-folk, and certainly succeeded; no one could have been more amusing, brilliant, and interesting. Even Erin, though she had been wounded on her most vulnerable point but half-an-hour before, gradually succumbed to his charm; and, forgetting her indignation, found herself chatting pleasantly with her enemy. At one moment, she thought him on the point of recognising her; she had been defending a certain favourite theory of hers, and had grown eager and enthusiastic over the discussion. Mark looked at her intently.

"You remind me of someone—I can't think who it can be. Your voice—I could almost swear I had heard it before."

"An accidental likeness," said his aunt. "The curious thing about them is, that so often more than one point corresponds. You are struck with a resemblance between two people who have never seen each other, and you find presently that they have many other things in common—they even think alike on various points."

"All the same, I am sure my Erin has no double!" cried Joan. "She is unique."

Erin, growing suddenly shy, was silent after this; and the work of identification proceeded no farther that evening.

On the next night, however, when she came downstairs, dressed for the ball, Mark, who in picturesque eighteenth-century attire was waiting in the drawing-room, after a glance at the pretty face under the scarlet hood, gave a little start.

"I know you now. Rose—Rosie—what is it? Antigone, my little fellow-traveller."

"You have been a long time in finding me out," said Erin, blushing and smiling with unaccountable pleasure.

"I am very, very glad to meet you again," said Mark, with apparently unfeigned earnestness. "I have often thought of you, and wondered what had become of you. No, you needn't look so incredulous. It is quite true. After all, how could I possibly be expected to identify my—rather miserable-looking little friend, with a prosperous young person like you—to find the forlorn waif comfortably established in the bosom of my own family?"

Erin had now seated herself, and Mark proceeded to examine her leisurely from the top of her knowing little hood, to the steel buckles on her pretty shoes: her skirt was, as has been said, of blue satin, her stockings of bluish-grey silk.

"Where is your basket?" he asked presently. "You are Red Riding-hood, aren't you?"

"No," returned Erin, reddening, "I am—supposed to be a Connemara peasant girl."

"Oh," with another comprehensive, but unsmiling, glance. "I see—it's very pretty."

"It's not very consistent, I'm afraid," went on the

girl, a little defiantly. "Lady Tweedale chose it—and, between her and her French dressmaker it has turned out very unlike my original design. But I was determined to represent *something* Irish."

She spoke quickly, and rather nervously, expecting some sarcastic rejoinder. But it did not suit Mr Wimbourne to be sarcastic just then; his face was perfectly serious, and wore, moreover, a kindly and gentle expression, which reminded Erin of her former hero. He, on his part, was evidently also trying to trace the red-cloaked traveller of that bygone day in the radiant vision of to-night.

"And how about your studies?" he asked presently, with the quiet earnestness which, in spite of herself, Erin found flattering. "You were very keen about your studies, I remember—have you learned as much as you wanted to?"

"Who ever does?" she cried. "No—not half—and I never shall. I want to know, and to know, and to know! Oh dear, the more one tries, the more ignorant one feels! It is like setting one's lips to the brink of an ocean—the taste of it only makes one thirst the more."

Wimbourne looked at her with interest and amusement, as her eager words came tumbling out one on top of the other, and her little hands gesticulated, and her eyes danced and flashed. Then, in his calm and rather sleepy fashion, he proceeded to inquire into the course of the studies she was actually pursuing, and to advise her in matter-of-fact tones, which made her feel a little ashamed of her recent enthusiasm. Yet, nevertheless, she was almost sorry when the *tête-à-tête* was put an end to by the entrance of Lady Tweedale, whose hybrid costume was a source of

equal satisfaction to herself, and amusement to her husband. Then Joan came in smart and trim, the three-cornered hat and hunting costume of green velvet and white satin very becoming, if not altogether realistic. Lastly, Sir Edward entered, in his smoking suit, and walked round, making sarcastic remarks on all present, and loudly rejoicing that *he* had not been persuaded to go in for any such tomfoolery.

"Look at her ladyship's white wig—it does not improve your looks, my dear, I can tell ye—makes your head look about twice too big. And what's that black thing on your face Adela—cut yourself?"

"It's a patch, you goose, and you know it is, quite well. Go away to your pipe if you haven't anything more pleasant to say."

Thus Lady Tweedale, accentuating the request with a little shake of her fan.

"Well, Mark, and what are you supposed to represent? 'Pon my word, he's got a white wig, and a brace of beauty-spots, too! Why, Mark, I didn't think you'd make such a figure of fun of yourself. Look at his fine flowered *weskit*," cried Sir Edward in his broadest North-country accent.

"Yes, isn't it smart? The white wig and patches are *de rigueur*, my dear uncle; and if you want to know, I chose this get-up because I thought it would make me rather less of a figure of fun than most others do. One always does look more or less of a fool in fancy dress."

"*You* do anyhow," assented Sir Edward, with a candour which would have disconcerted anyone less thoroughly at ease than Mark. "As for my poor little Joan——"

"Now, you musn't say anything rude about your poor little Joan," interrupted that young person. "The fact is, you are just beside yourself with envy—isn't he, mamma? You haven't got a white wig, you dear, old, bald thing, and you're secretly pining for one, and for a flowered waistcoat like Mark's—you think your figure would display it to greater advantage than his, and so it would. You were lazy, and unsociable, and disagreeable, and said nothing would induce you to go to this ball—and now you repent it. Never mind, dear—smoke your pipe and go to bed, and mamma will tell you all about it when she comes home in the morning."

"I beg she'll do nothing of the kind," responded Sir Edward. "Well, there's the carriage—good-night, all of you. Good-night, Joaney, you little saucy minx. Ha! ha! I think I and my pipe will have the best of it after all."

Exit Sir Edward, chuckling and rolling his broad shoulders; and downstairs went the ball-goers, the servants being collected in the hall to see them pass.

"It is Mdlle. Irène who looks beautiful," observed one of the maids to another in a whisper.

"And milady, then!" cried the old cook. "Did you remark her shoulders? Fat and *potelées*! It is she who is *bien*."

It was such a new experience to Erin that she felt a little bewildered when she entered the fine suite of rooms, already crowded with figures in motley attire. Joan, who had many acquaintances, was at once surrounded by a bevy of young girls, who stood herded together according to Belgian custom, with smiling faces and wandering eyes, waiting the advent of their different *danseurs*.

Presently a bustle and stir announced the approach of Royalty.

"We are all supposed to walk round the room with our cotillon partners," said Joan. "Have you got one? I thought Mark had asked you—where *is* Mark? Ah, here he comes. He has established mamma comfortably next dear old Madame Van den Berg, and now he is coming this way, looking, as usual, as if the whole place belonged to him."

"Well," observed Mr Wimbourne casually, "I believe the show is going to begin. Are you engaged for the cotillon, Miss Fitzgerald? May I have the pleasure, then?"

"I must tell you that I have never seen such a thing before, and don't know anything about it," said Erin, after she had signified her acceptance. "This is my first ball, you know."

"Oh?" returned Mark, looking at her dubiously. "But you can *dance*, can't you?"

He was obviously relieved when Erin replied in the affirmative.

"That's all right. Keep your eyes open, and see what other people do. Now, let me give you a piece of advice—don't tell anyone else it is your first ball."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because — well, I don't know — I shouldn't advise you to. I don't think, nowadays, people care much about *ingénues*. The word 'débutante' conveys a general impression of immaturity and incapacity, and, if I were disposed to be very rude and vulgar, I should say greenness—which is not, as a rule, to a girl's advantage."

"I shall tell the first man I meet, and judge of

the effect on him," retorted Erin with spirit. "Perhaps everyone hasn't such an ungenerous mind as you. Besides, I don't care what impression it produces. People must take me as I am, or not at all."

"Try it," advised Mr Wimbourne impartially. "I don't fancy you will find it answer; but there is nothing like buying one's experience for oneself. Oh, I see they are moving on now. We must go very slowly, so as to give their Majesties time to survey us thoroughly. I suppose you can curtsey, by-the-by. Oh, you can?—I am glad to hear it, because I really couldn't presume to support you if you wobbled."

The procession slowly passed round the room, each couple pausing to salute the King and Queen, and the more favoured few being honoured by a remark or two from the royal lips.

"Ah, Little Red Riding-Hood, of course," said His Majesty, as Erin accomplished her reverence. "And who is her cavalier?—not the wolf in disguise, let us hope."

"No, sire," said Mark, with a bow; "the woodcutter, who has made his fortune."

"Perhaps the more dangerous companion of the two," commented the king, the royal repartee arousing mirth among the bystanders.

Mark was still smiling when, as they resumed their place in the ranks a moment or two later, Erin glanced at him.

"I didn't think you were a sycophant," she remarked, with some asperity.

"Neither did I? Whence this severity?"

"Should you have thought the king's remark the

least bit funny if he hadn't been the king?—but there you are, smirking as if it were intensely witty. And what did you mean by saying you were the wood-cutter? I can't see the joke."

"You must not analyse too closely," returned Mark placidly. "One says things on the spur of the moment with the intention, at least, of being smart and clever; and as most people have not got such critical minds as you, they generally accept the will for the deed. . . . Here is Joan coming up with a portentous face, and a young man in tow as usual. She has been trotting up young men to you ever since we arrived. I hope you are satisfied."

Erin did not reply, and Joan accomplished the introduction of the Baron Octave Van den Berg—a tall, fair, good-looking youth, with something ingenuous in his face and manner which was rather attractive. During the course of the evening, moreover, he spoke frequently of Joan, congratulating Erin on her friendship with her, with a frank enthusiasm which delighted her.

Mark watched the couple with amusement, and subsequently rallied Erin on her animation when talking or dancing with the golden-haired "Octave."

"I like him very much," said Erin. "I told him it was my first ball," she added defiantly, "and he was really nice—quite different to you—and said he hoped I would allow him to introduce some of his friends, and would felicitate himself if he could in any way contribute to my enjoyment."

"He evidently *has* a generous mind," returned Mark meditatively. "Just fancy the position that man would have been in if you had bored, not only himself, but his friends, to extinction, after the fashion

of many bread-and-butter misses—if you had danced badly, and made stupid mistakes. No, he is not like me. You are quite right—sweet seventeen, ignorance, simplicity, and all the rest of it—it 's not in my line."

"I wonder you should have condescended to ask me for the cotillon," exclaimed Erin, irritated by his tone.

"I felt pretty sure of you," he returned, with admirable impudence. "Otherwise, I should not have committed myself."

The music now striking up, and the first figure of the cotillon being inaugurated, all Erin's attention was concentrated on the matter in hand. She acquitted herself well, Mark helping her with an occasional word whenever his greater experience proved a more trustworthy guide than her quickness of sight and wit.

Her beauty attracted a good deal of attention, and she had much *succès*, as many of Lady Tweedale's friends hastened to assure her, being continually singled out for bouquets and other marks of appreciation.

Mark complimented her towards the close of the evening, as they watched an apparently interminable cushion figure.

"Do you know you have had quite a triumph? I congratulate you. I should withdraw all my offensive remarks, only that I feel you substantiate them. You are the exception which proves the rule."

"Please don't talk like that," cried Erin. "I know it is all pretence. I know by the way you have helped me to-night. Besides, long ago, when we first met, if you had been as cold-hearted and selfish as you make believe to be, you would not have gone out of your way to be kind to me."

"I didn't go out of my way," returned Mark, with provoking indifference. "I happened to have nothing to do, and it was very dull; and you were a pretty little girl, and cried daintily. If you had snivelled and given yourself a red nose, I should have left you alone. No, I am afraid I am not more unselfish than the rest of my kind. If you have had any illusions concerning me," he added, looking at her oddly, "pray dismiss them from your mind. I am, at least, nothing of a Pharisee, for I own I am very much as other men, except that, perhaps, I have rather more ambition than most of them. I mean to get on in the world, somehow—some time—*coûte que coûte.*"

It was a relief to Erin when, at this moment, the smiling Octave came up to claim her as his partner in a mystic measure, connected with bells or ribbons, or some other cotillon charms. Her enjoyment was checked; she felt disenchanted and disgusted with Mark, and yet oddly humiliated by him. How dared he, with that suave impertinence of his, beg her to dismiss her too favourable opinion of him? What grounds had she given him for supposing she concerned herself in the least about him? The thought of his look, of his smile, of his tone, as he said, "If you have had any illusions concerning me," maddened her. She was glad the evening was almost over, for it was more than she could do to feign unconcern in his company, and she would not show pique.

"Are you tired, dear?" asked Lady Tweedale, wondering at her silence, as they drove home.

"Dreadfully," said Erin.

"But you did enjoy it, didn't you?" cried Joan. "I could see by your face you did. Which of your partners did you like best?"

"Monsieur Octave Van den Berg, I think."

"I thought you would. He really is not at all bad—for a Belgian. A little bit 'finicky,' according to our views, but still——"

"I don't call him a bit finicky; he's very nice," interrupted Erin warmly.

Here Mark coughed gently, and his aunt inquired if he felt the open window too much.

"No," he responded, "it was only my delicate way of recalling my presence. I was beginning to feel a little nervous over these maiden disclosures. Monsieur Octave Van den Berg is a happy man—I think he looks clean, too."

"Mark!" cried aunt and cousin, in little shrieks, "what do you mean?"

"How horrid you are," added Joan.

"Well, my dear aunt, I only said I thought he looked clean. He *does* look clean. It's a great advantage to a man, especially a foreigner."

"This is, I suppose, a specimen of your English family jokes," observed Erin, addressing Joan. "You have often told me about them, and now I understand the kind of thing. You laugh at it because one of your relations perpetrates it—but other people are not bound to find it amusing."

"Not unless they are staying in the house," put in Mark gravely; "then it is considered better form."

"What are you all talking about?" said Lady Tweedale. "I think Monsieur Octave Van den Berg a very nice young man, and I am very fond of his mother. But here we are at home. Girls, don't chatter till all hours. Erin is over-tired as it is."

"Pleasant fatigue doesn't count," said Joan, pirouetting across the hall.

CHAPTER V

A BATTLE

"MY dear Erin, you look a perfect wreck!" Lady Tweedale put on her pince-nez and inspected the girl with a displeased and astonished air as she approached the breakfast table. "Joan, how long *did* you stay in that child's room last night?"

"I hadn't a chance of staying long," cried Joan, in an aggrieved tone. "She turned me out just when I was beginning to feel lively——"

"Well, really, I do think, when one is very tired and a person dances about one's room at three o'clock in the morning, one may be excused if one shows a little irritation," retorted Erin. "If you had seen her, Lady Tweedale, waltzing round and round, you would have understood my being cross—I wanted to go to bed."

"Doesn't she talk like an old woman?" cried Joan. "Her first ball, too! After all, as I say, it is good to be young—why not caper while you can? In spite of your wisdom, Erin, I am much less tired than you this morning. Didn't you sleep? I know, the music got into your head, didn't it? It's an awful nuisance when it does. But it won't have the same effect on you after a time."

Erin shook her head, but made no reply.

"I really must go and see what Sir Edward is

doing," said her ladyship, suddenly rising. "He is getting shockingly lazy in the mornings. I don't see why *he* shouldn't be in time for breakfast because *I* have been to a ball. Look after Mark when he comes down, Joan, and do try and make that child eat something."

"Joan," said Erin solemnly, as soon as they were alone, "I don't intend ever to go to a ball again as long as I live. I made that resolution last night while I was lying awake. I feel miserable—disgusted with myself. I have lowered myself—I—oh, I hate myself."

"Why?" asked Mark, who had entered unnoticed by the two girls, and who now drew near, fresh and trim, and smiling. "Good-morning, Joan—(coffee, please—not much milk, thanks!)—good-morning," with a little laughing nod across the table at Erin, "why do you hate yourself to-day?"

"You have interrupted a private conversation," said Joan. "If you were well-bred, you would not pretend to have overheard anything."

"Joan, you are wrong. Candour is, on the contrary, a sign of good breeding. You have the most antiquated notions in this family! The more plainly one speaks nowadays the better form it is. But I really am curious to know why Miss Fitzgerald hates herself this morning."

Erin had now recovered herself in some degree, and returned lightly, "I am in a misanthropic mood, that's all—and hate everything and everyone, myself included."

"Do you hate me?" said Joan, putting down the coffee-pot, and assuming a funny little injured air.

"Not this morning—I hated you last night, when you danced round my room."

"Do you hate me?" asked Mark.

"Yes, when you ask questions."

Mark looked up with an air of approval. But at this moment Sir Edward came down, very cross and solemn, and only half awake. It was an understood thing that no one was to speak to him till he had had at least one cup of tea and an egg. Till then, he was unapproachable. He frowned at them all round as he entered, examined his letters with a funereal expression, announced briefly that her ladyship was a good hand at running up bills, that Morris became more of an idiot every day, and that he didn't suppose Fletewood would be habitable by the time they returned. Then he inspected Wimbourne's plate, and wanted to know why he was eating butter and jam together; and finally, looking sternly at Erin, remarked that if she brought back such a white face as that from her balls and thingumajigs, she would do better to stay at home with him.

"I think I shall," she returned, laughing. "They are not in my line, Sir Edward. You and I will take care of each other in future."

Sir Edward visibly unbent, but made no rejoinder; and when Joan approached with a piece of toast which she had heated up for him at the fire, though he scowled at her fiercely as he detached it from the fork, he finally drew down her face and kissed it.

"Now," cried Joan, "you are evidently ready for your second cup. Erin, go upstairs to the drawing-room and rest. Take your bundle of treason with you"—tucking a number of newspapers under her friend's arm—"and soothe yourself with Mr ———'s latest figures of speech. Now, mind; choose a

comfortable chair, and toast yourself well by the fire. You look frozen this morning. I shall come up and look after you as soon as papa has finished his breakfast."

"You can go now, if you like. I don't want you, I'm sure," growled papa, evincing symptoms of relapse, which Joan cheerfully ignored.

"I will escort Miss Fitzgerald upstairs, and see that she is comfortably established," volunteered Mark. "You really do look ill this morning," he added, with an air of concern, as he followed her out of the room.

"I wish everyone would not consider it necessary to make remarks about my appearance," said Erin sharply. "And I assure you I am quite capable of walking upstairs by myself."

She paused half-way up the first flight, and looked impatiently round. Mark stopped two steps lower down.

"Say another word and I will carry your newspapers! I am pledged to Joan to look after your comfort."

"You are very tiresome!" cried Erin, continuing the ascent, however, with a shrug of her shoulders.

Mark stalked after her, carefully closed the door, shook up the cushions in the most comfortable arm-chair, pushed it close to the hearth, placed a footstool in front of it, and invited Erin, with a wave of the hand, to take possession.

Then he stood on the hearthrug opposite to her, leaning his back against the chimney-piece, and surveying her with a pleased smile.

"I flatter myself Joan could not have done it better," he remarked. "Now, you are longing for me to go away, I know; and so I will, directly, but I want to say one word to you first."

He leaned forward a little, and touched the papers in her lap; then, resuming his former position, shook his head slightly.

"It won't do," he said; "you will find it won't do."

"What won't do?" cried Erin, on the alert at once.

"I know exactly the frame of mind you are in this morning," he pursued, contemplating her curiously. "Believe me, your remorse is quite uncalled-for. It is useless to struggle against your fate. Not though you forswear for ever all innocent amusements, and steep yourself to the very lips in the amenities of your favourite orators——!"

Erin looked up, flushing and frowning. But he went on, without noticing her displeasure, "I know all about it, you see. You are about to devote the morning to Fenian literature, in the hope of atoning to yourself for the frivolity of last night. You are quite ashamed of having enjoyed yourself——"

"I didn't enjoy myself," interrupted Erin scornfully. "It is true, at first, with the music and the novelty and the excitement I was carried away—but afterwards I hated it; and now, as I said to Joan, I hate myself. I am not like other girls—I have seen too much of the serious side of life. I have too much to think of, too much to do, to care for things of the kind. Last night I was foolish——"

"Poor little girl!" said Mark, very kindly. "You think you have a mission in life, don't you? You want to do something very heroic—very tragic—you want, perhaps, to play at being a patriot, as last night you played at being a peasant. Well, take my word for it, there will be as much reality about the one performance as there was about the other. Your peasant garb was perforce of satin and velvet, remem-

ber,—your patriotism will masquerade in much the same style. Situated as you are," he continued, disregarding her attempt to interrupt him, "everything unites to trammel you. Youth, wealth, luxurious surroundings, the love of your friends, all will hem you in. This will be your tragedy. You will struggle and long to do something wonderful and heroic—and you will be obliged to content yourself with a happy girl's life. I don't say that you will not be able to gratify *some* of your wishes," he added, smiling. "You will probably spend a great deal of money, and do many foolish things; but, I think—I hope—you will be preserved from taking any steps seriously detrimental to yourself."

"That will do," said Erin. "I have heard quite enough, thanks. You can keep your opinion, and I will keep mine. Time will show whether I am in earnest or not. Meanwhile, I should be obliged if you would choose some other subject on which to exercise your prophetic powers."

She unfolded one of her newspapers with a resolute air, holding it so that Mark could not see her face: the expression of his changed slightly, but, after a moment, he too provided himself with a paper from the heap on her knee, and sank into the opposite arm-chair.

A few minutes later Joan, entering, found them immersed in their respective journals, and paused, laughing.

"Has Erin been trying to convert you, Mark?"

"I am endeavouring to discover the secret of the fascination which Miss Fitzgerald evidently finds in this particular class of literature," he replied, laying down the sheet with a slight yawn, "and I have

decided that it must be because of the choice and original metaphors employed by her favourite speakers. Here I see a speech at some League meeting in which somebody remarks that you could not throw away a dead cat without hitting a bad landlord. It is a little exaggerated, perhaps, but still distinctly vigorous."

"Vulgar, I call it," observed Joan, wrinkling up her little nose disdainfully.

"I daresay it is true, though," cried Erin hotly. "Many facts in Ireland are grim and unpleasant and vulgar enough, heaven knows. Starvation, and rags, and misery, and cruel oppression——"

"Observe," said Mark to Joan, "what an apt pupil your friend is. She is not one of those who read without retaining."

"But seriously, Erin dear," said Joan, crossing to the hearthrug and sitting down at her friend's feet, "you *can't* like reading about dead cats and things——"

"What are you talking about?" said Lady Tweedale, entering in her turn, and tapping her nephew on the shoulder as a hint to him to surrender her favourite chair. "Where's my knitting, Joan? Mark, what are you doing up here at this time of morning. Your uncle is looking for you—and that is my chair."

"I beg your pardon," said Mark, rising and leaning against the chimney-piece. "We are trying to explain to ourselves the reason of Miss Erin's delight in her special budget of newspapers. Joan and I think the style a little startling, but Miss Fitzgerald seems to approve of it."

"Poor, dear, odd child," remarked Lady Tweedale, placidly. "I have looked over her papers once or

twice, and thought their sentiments quite shocking. She is too clever, really, to like that sort of thing—but I fancy she tries to."

"You are quite wrong. There is no pretence about me," retorted Erin. "Of course I can see plainly enough the errors of style—yes, and of judgment too." (Here Mark elevated his eyebrows.) "Many of the men who speak, and some of those who write, are ill-educated and unrefined—I don't deny it. But they love their country and they speak the truth—and that is why I like reading what they say. And these vulgar newspapers give one certain facts—very shocking, no doubt——"

"And *dreadfully* exaggerated," said Lady Tweedale, plaintively. "And she believes them *all*, Mark."

"Which," continued the girl, without heeding the interruption, "it is well for one to know. It would be well," she went on with gathering ire, as she observed that Wimbourne was critically examining the *bric-à-brac* on the chimney-piece, "it would be well if other people studied these facts too—but most of those who aspire to rule us are as ignorant of the atrocities which are perpetrated in my unfortunate country day by day, in this enlightened and civilised nineteenth century, as they are of our dreary history in the past."

"Dreary history!" cried Joan. "I am glad at last to hear you admit that Irish history *is* dreary! You usually pretend to like studying those appalling little green books in your room. She has got a row of books, Mark—dreadful little books, all bound alike in grass-green with harps on them. Why, I wonder, is it considered invariably necessary to bind *all* books connected with Irish affairs in that particularly ugly

shade of green? Now we, you know, Erin dear, are quite as patriotic in our own way, and yet we don't have all our books bound in red with lions ramping over them."

Mark took up another little cup and inspected the mark on the bottom; then he looked at a photograph——

"Is this Poppy's last?" he said. "How good!"

"You can't compare the two countries," cried Erin. "We in Ireland make efforts—what seem to outsiders ridiculous efforts—to assert our nationality in every way we can. We try to reanimate the smouldering spark of patriotism in breasts where it has been stifled by——"

"Centuries of wrong," interposed Mark blandly. "That is the phrase, I think——"

Erin, who had been more and more irritated by what she took to be the contempt of his attitude, now fairly lost her temper.

"The cant phrase you would say, I suppose," she cried, with flashing eyes. "Yes, I know it is one that is commonly used among us, but it is none the less true. You and your kind are so used to our miseries that they have even ceased to bore you. You hear of them with a sneer, and dismiss them with a gibe—rather glad than otherwise to have the chance of showing off your own wit. But do you think that makes them less real? On the contrary, when you take the trouble to inquire into it, you generally find a cant phrase a good one."

"I think it is going to snow," observed Lady Tweedale, in gentle, purring tones.

"The wrongs of Ireland are accumulated wrongs," went on the girl, still at white heat. "The injuries

under which the Irish peasant of to-day is still groaning are heavier because he remembers the injuries of his ancestors——"

"Now, now, now," interposed Joan, springing up and laughing—"don't let's squabble any more! My darling, if we were all to begin to groan over the injuries of our ancestors, the world would be a very dreary place. I am sure we English Catholics would have plenty to groan about. Good gracious! Didn't they hang us and behead us by scores in Elizabeth's time, and flatten us to death between two boards with stones under our backs? Why, even a few years ago—comparatively a few years ago—a Catholic couldn't have a horse worth more than five pounds!—" cried Joan, as though this were the culminating horror—"and yet we never think of brooding and letting ourselves be embittered by these things!"

"My dear Joan," cried Erin, very much nettled, "your argument does not in the least apply. You English can afford to let bygones be bygones, because you are now so well off. We in Ireland," she continued, with increasing warmth, "are still oppressed by an alien Government, still trampled upon——"

Mark Wimbourne turned round abruptly. "'I cannot consent to regard myself nor to allow myself to be regarded in that bony light'—quotation, in case you may not know it. Miss Fitzgerald, what have I done that I should be considered a trampler?"

Lady Tweedale smiled over her knitting, and Joan laughed. Erin looked up, more angry than ever.

"I assure you," continued Mark mildly, "I don't want to trample on anybody. I am not by nature

a trampler. I feel that the accusation is intended for me—indeed, you have been hurling so many denunciations at me that I am quite overcome. But even a worm will turn. I will not submit tamely to your last impeachment."

"I 'm not going to talk any more," said Erin, throwing herself back on her cushions. "It 's no use. You will not argue with me fairly—you sneer at every word I say."

She paused, her lip quivering with wrath and mortification. Mark looked at her keenly, but said nothing.

CHAPTER VI

BURYING THE HATCHET

LATER in the afternoon, Mark chanced to go to the drawing-room in search of a book of reference, which he had left there the day before. He expected to find the room empty, Lady Tweedale and Joan being out driving, and Sir Edward having betaken himself to his club. Erin had been advised to lie down in her room, and had apparently acquiesced, therefore he was surprised to discover her in the embrasure of a window. She was lying back in an arm-chair fast asleep; and Mark, after an admiring glance at the beautiful contour of the slight unconscious figure, would have withdrawn with all silence and discretion, had not one little circumstance attracted his attention. It was a very insignificant circumstance, and yet, oddly enough, identical with the one which had years before first brought about his introduction to Erin: neither more nor less than the appearance on the ground beside her of a small limp pocket-handkerchief. It looked very limp—could it be that it was damp with tears?

He stepped noiselessly a little nearer. There was something mournful in the attitude of the figure in the chair—the hands drooped wearily, the little head was thrown back listlessly, as though slumber had caught it unawares, the face was pale, the lips curved sorrowfully—were those tears upon the cheeks and upon the dark locked lashes?

Pooh! nonsense! this girl was not of the crying kind: his uncle called her "a little spitfire," his aunt had confessed with gentle tolerance that she was occasionally cross, he had seen for himself that she was as quick of temper as of wit; she could fight, and argue, and resent—but she would not be so foolish as to weep over a few bantering words.

Yet, there certainly was something glistening on that pretty oval cheek—was it a tear, was it? Mark felt he must know. He drew nearer still and bent over the girl, his usually impassive face assuming an expression of shocked and tender concern. At that moment, with a great start, she awoke and looked at him. Her blue eyes, heavy still with slumber and recent sorrow, immediately assumed an expression of dislike, mingled with fear.

Mark hastily resumed an erect position, but his face did not at once regain its composure; on the contrary, it looked a little foolish and very much troubled. The expression which had all at once leapt into Erin's waking eyes disturbed him even more than the tears which he had so unwillingly detected. Why did the child look at him like that? Drawing a long breath, he made an effort to regain his assurance. Was it not natural, after all, that she should be startled by his sudden apparition; when they had chatted together for a little bit her self-possession would return to her. "I am so very sorry I awoke you," he observed, with his usual airy manner. "I wanted to make sure you really were asleep, or I should not have run the risk of disturbing you—" he broke off, laughing at himself. "I must say I have worded my excuse after a fashion that would do credit to one of your own countrymen."

"For goodness sake do not bring up the subject of my countrymen again," cried Erin petulantly.

She half rose, as though to put an end to the conversation; but Mark, seating himself astride of a small cane chair that stood handy, with apparent unconsciousness barred her path. "I am so glad you are awake," he observed pleasantly, "I am just in the mood for a little conversation."

The girl had unwillingly reseated herself, and now looked at him with that odd blend of defiance, dislike, and fear, which had before made Mark feel uncomfortable. He was not accustomed to see such an expression on the countenance of anyone on whom he chose to bestow his society, particularly when the person in question happened to be a woman.

It was true he had occasionally detected a little tremor on the part of the fair one whom he elected to gratify with his presence, but this discovery had merely amused and flattered him. He was quite aware of his own reputation for quiet sarcasm and quickness of repartee; it was becoming and natural that people should pull themselves together and sharpen up their wits when preparing to converse with him. Women, as a rule, talked nonsense; but if they talked it prettily, and were amusing and flippant, he could tolerate and even like it. Now and then it was his custom to pose them by some innocent-sounding remark, to pull them up, as it were, very gently, just to keep them on their mettle; but he did so with such grace and charm that it merely enhanced their opinion of his cleverness without causing them to doubt their own.

As he now sat, gently rocking his chair in a manner somewhat dangerous to its slender pro-

portions, and contemplating Erin, he was conscious of an inward pang of annoyance, mingled with self-reproach. This child was afraid of him—unpleasantly afraid of him: it was a state of things not to be tolerated. He ceased rocking the chair and spoke gravely and earnestly.

"My excuse was a very poor one, particularly as it did not happen to be true. I was perfectly aware that you were asleep, and took advantage of the fact to try and find out if you had been crying."

Erin flushed, and the hands folded on her lap trembled; she longed to leave the room, but had not the courage to make her way past her questioner.

"I know you think me very impertinent," he pursued almost humbly; "but I can't help it. I see that you have been crying, and I have a very uncomfortable idea that it was partly my fault."

Erin had been quite unprepared for this direct attack, and was for a moment unable to meet it. She was physically weak after the excitement of the previous night, and had been further unnerved by the discussion of the morning. She did not feel equal to a renewal of this discussion now, and her countenance so plainly expressed this repugnance that his remorse was increased.

"I believe," he cried, with a vexed laugh, "you are half afraid to talk to me at all! You think I must be going to say something disagreeable!"

"Well, you have said a good many disagreeable things to me, haven't you?" retorted Erin with spirit.

"And yet," interposed Mark, suddenly dropping his chin on his folded hands, which were crossed over the back of the chair, "I think you are more angry with me when I am silent than when I speak."

"Because your silence is so contemptuous! If you would argue fairly—if you would give me the chance of saying what it is I feel, and why I feel it, it would be a different matter. But you never do."

Mark sighed. "The fact is," he explained, "I have a constitutional dislike to talking politics with women. I never do if I can help it. I have to, of course, sometimes, but I will not disguise from you that it bores me. I will even admit, in confidence, that I find the ladies of the Primrose League a little wearing!"

He raised his head again, laughing; then added, in a more serious tone, "In your case, I must tell you frankly that I dislike intensely to hear you patter off so glibly the cheap jargon which I am accustomed to hear too much of elsewhere. Your lips were framed for quite a different prattle, and your mind was meant to feed on other stuff—to me there is something so incongruous between yourself and your views that I feel personally injured and affronted when I hear you discuss them. There! forgive me this last disagreeable speech, and let us bury the hatchet in future."

Erin sprang up hastily.

"Let me pass, please," she cried imperiously, "I really can see no object in prolonging this conversation. I must say I cannot understand you," she continued, with more heat. "You say you are sorry for having wounded me—you pretend to apologise, and then you insult me again!"

Mark had jerked his chair backwards when she rose, and sat looking at her sideways, a little taken aback at this sudden outburst. Now, however, as she remained standing before him, he was obliged to rise too, but he did not move out of the way.

"Such is the reward of virtue in this life," he re-

marked plaintively. "You have several times accused me of being insincere, Miss Erin; yet, when I do speak my mind plainly, you are angry! Forgive me, and let us forget politics. Good heavens! there are other things in the world besides politics."

"How can I forget them?" cried Erin passionately. "You do not know what my life has been. How can I forget what I have seen, and heard, and felt? I have myself suffered from the oppression under which my country is groaning!"

She paused, fancying that she saw Mark Wimbourne wince, but continued vehemently, "I cannot help it if my speech offends your ears, I must speak of things as I know them. Besides," with a sudden, quick change of tone, "even if I could forget, you would not let me. Are you not always sneering at the things which I hold dear, jeering at my country and the friends of my country? You lead on Sir Edward, and he becomes worse than you—yes, you do, and it is ungenerous of you, for you know I cannot retort to him, and sometimes I can hardly sit still. Even to-day, when you knew—or, at least, you might have known—how miserable I felt, you could not leave me in peace!"

"To-day," repeated Mark, supporting himself by the chair, and blinking his eyes in the effort to remember, "what *did* I say to-day? I thought I had been particularly careful—since the morning, I mean."

"Do you not remember at luncheon," pursued Erin, with a quivering lip, "you know what you said about Mr Gladstone?"

"About Mr Gladstone?" echoed Mark, breaking into a laugh, "really, I did not know that you were sensitive on that point. There was a time, remember,

when he and his myrmidons, Buckshot Forster and the rest, were not thought so very highly of in the Green Isle. But now, no doubt, he has repented the error of his ways."

"Yes, he has; he has been generous enough and courageous enough to own that he was in error. He has earned the love and respect of all true Irishmen. You may jeer as you like, he is a great and good man."

Mark slowly slid down on his chair again, murmuring, "Ye Gods!" under his breath; then, extending his long brown forefinger, he designated the arm-chair which Erin had just vacated.

"I really must be rude enough to keep you prisoner," he said; "this point must be cleared up. Do sit down again," he added persuasively, "I will not say a word, I will not smile a smile, that you can construe into an affront. Truly, Miss Erin, I had no intention of offending you by my allusion to the Grand Old Man to-day."

Erin had half-involuntarily reseated herself, and now looked at him with her large, angry eyes.

"Well, you might have known," she said with asperity, "any logical person might know, I think, that it must annoy an Irish Nationalist to hear Mr Gladstone abused."

"Then," returned Mark pensively, "I suppose I must promise to refrain from abusing him in your presence in future. It will be difficult, for it is one of the dearest privileges of the respectable Briton—but I will try. And now, my little friend and fellow-traveller, let us make peace. Believe me, when I tell you that I am sorry for having annoyed you—I am more than sorry, I cannot forgive myself for having made you cry."

Erin looked up, startled by his sudden change of tone; he seemed to speak with real feeling, there was genuine kindness in his eyes, and his smile was almost tender. But she was still doubtful and on the defensive: this man could play any part he chose; had she not already proved him to he insincere?

"Will you not shake hands?" said Mark.

Scarcely waiting for her permission, his strong fingers closed on her cold and passive ones: he held them a moment, and then let them go, looking into her eyes the while.

"You have not really forgiven me," he said softly. "How am I to make you forgive me?"

Erin was silent, and he went on, speaking indulgently, as one would speak to a child—a tone, be it said, which Erin found harder to bear than his most sarcastic one. "Come, how shall I do penance for my misdemeanours? Will it satisfy you if I give you permission to say every hard thing you like of the cruel Saxon? I will promise to bear it with equanimity, even with cheerfulness. I will listen in patience if you attack Lord Salisbury, and smile while you stamp upon Balfour. Seriously, I wish I knew how to bring about a renewal of our friendship."

"We can never be friends," cried Erin passionately. "We are unsympathetic to each other—we have not a thought nor a feeling in common. I have been unhappy ever since you came—everything that I hold most dear, most sacred, is a sport to you, and you cannot even understand how you make me suffer."

"I?" cried Mark, with an astonishment and emotion which even Erin could see was unfeigned. "Upon my word and honour, I had no idea the matter went so deep with you."

"How can it fail to go deep with me?" she interrupted. "Believe me or not, as you choose, the strongest and warmest feeling I possess is love for my country. For years I had nothing else—I had nothing else to love. My only friends, the peasants who brought me up, were driven from their home and exiled to America. The priest, who was the only father I ever knew, died when I was still a child, and I was left alone—dependent in the house of a man I hated. Then it was that I first remembered that I had a country to love and live for—and I have loved and lived for it ever since. Oh! I know you cannot understand me — you think I am talking wildly. I can only tell you it is so. When you insult my country," she went on, leaning forward eagerly, her lips quivering, her eyes shining, her whole frame shaking with strong, and to Mark inexplicable emotion—"when you insult my country, I feel as though you struck me."

Mark was startled, almost shocked; the language was exaggerated, the comparison extravagant, but there was no mistaking the deep and passionate sincerity of look and tone. The girl meant what she said, and felt it. He sat upright, gazing at her for a moment, before replying; then he exclaimed, with genuine emotion, "What a brute beast you must think me."

The unexpectedness of the comment made Erin laugh, but she quickly became grave again, and involuntarily stretched out her hands with a piteous gesture, crying with unconscious pathos, "No, indeed, I don't think that—it only seems to me hard that you *won't* understand!"

"I mean to understand now," said Mark, with the

curious persuasive gentleness which he could assume when he chose, and which most people found irresistible. "As you say, I do not know your life, nor realise how it is that you have come to take these matters to heart so keenly. Suppose you were to tell me all about it, now—it interests me very much, and I should be really grateful if you would."

Erin—still a prey to the most intense excitement, sharp enough, moreover, to discover that this time, at least, the interest was not assumed, and actuated accordingly by a sudden wild hope of gaining over to her cause this notable adversary—launched out, after a moment's pause, into the story of her childhood. She described the scenes which had made so deep an impression upon her in the past with a picturesqueness which rendered them vivid; she spoke of the people and surroundings whose influence had moulded her character with a tenderness which Mark had not given her credit for possessing: when she told of those lonely months which succeeded Father's Lalor's death, and how, in her desperate craving for some worthy object on which to pour out her young love and enthusiasm, she had stretched out her arms on the solitary hill-top, and kissed its mossy surface, and dreamed that she was being clasped to the bosom of her mother, he heaved a little impatient sigh, and looked at her so oddly that she broke off suddenly, sobered and ashamed.

"Now, you are laughing at me," she cried tremulously.

"I never felt less inclined to laugh in my life," asserted Mark. "On the contrary, I don't think I ever heard anything so pathetic. Please go on."

"There is no more to say now," said Erin shyly. "You know all about my school-life and how I come

to be here. It was very kind of you to listen so patiently," she added, with a certain timid gratitude which Mark found touching, and also surprising. "And now you—you will have more sympathy, will you not?"

"I will have a great deal more sympathy with you," returned Mark, more moved than he would have cared to own to himself.

"And with my people?" pleaded Erin again, leaning forward and looking at him with those great, earnest, innocent eyes, which could not have been coquettish if they had tried.

"I will promise," said Mark very gravely, "never again to speak of your people in your presence in a manner which might hurt you."

Erin's face fell.

"But you will not think of them less harshly,—you will still try to oppose their hopes?"

"Every man must think for himself," returned Mark, still gravely and gently, "and act as it seems to him right."

Erin rose but ill-satisfied; and this time Mark suffered her to pass without further protest. She walked to the door with lagging steps, half expecting, poor little unsophisticated creature! that Mark would call her back to offer some compromise. She had made it all so clear to him, she had told him so plainly what she had seen, and what she had known. He had been so evidently impressed by the recital that she could not understand how his prejudices could endure.

When Lady Tweedale returned, she found her nephew standing at the drawing-room window, near which Erin had been sitting, drumming absently on the pane.

"What! you here, Mark, and all alone? Why did you not go out with your uncle? I fear you must have been having a dull time of it?"

"I have had anything but a dull time," responded Mark, without turning round. "I have been talking to Miss Erin—I never knew so much about her before."

"And what do you think of her now?" inquired his aunt, dropping into the arm-chair beside him.

"I think her most peculiar—most extraordinary," replied Mark, suddenly turning, so as to face her.

Lady Tweedale looked a little discomfited. "Of course she has had the most extraordinary bringing up—you must make allowances for her prejudices —they will disappear in time."

"On the contrary, her prejudices appear to me most deeply rooted. Her views of life are partly those of a child, and partly those of a poet; largely, alas! coloured by the objectionable tenets of the party to which she elects to belong. No, she will never change—and perhaps it is all for the best."

"My dear Mark, why should you say that?"

"Because she is perfectly adorable as she is," he returned coolly.

Lady Tweedale burst out laughing.

"You take my breath away,"—then, with a sudden change of tone—"you are jesting as usual; but I will not have my little Erin turned into ridicule. She is a sweet, lovable child."

"I assure you, I am perfectly serious; 'lovable' is too tame a word to apply to such a personality. I tell you, she is adorable." And with that, he stepped quietly past his aunt, and went out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

PROBLEMS AND PREJUDICES

"WHAT is the matter with Joan?" asked Mark, as Lady Tweedale entered the smoking-room on the following afternoon. "She passed me just now on the stairs with what may be vulgarly termed a 'flounce,' and cut me very short when I proffered some trivial remark. Something seems to have put her out— By-the-by, you look rather cross yourself."

"No, not cross, dear Mark. Joan and I have had an argument—even Joan is a little unreasonable now and then. You see, she makes quite an idol of Erin, she thinks nobody good enough for her."

"In what way 'good enough'—in the matrimonial way? Perhaps she is right. Who is the particular somebody at present under discussion?"

"Oh, I daresay there is nothing in it. I happened to mention to Joan that I thought Octave Van den Berg very attentive to Erin the other night, and that I had just had a rather mysterious note from his mother, asking if she might come and see me to-morrow morning on a matter of great importance, which concerned the happiness of her son."

"Really—they don't lose time over these matters in Belgium, it seems. He has only seen her once, has he?"

"Oh, I don't suppose she means the business to

be settled off-hand. She probably wishes to sound me on the subject, to obtain my permission for Octave to pay his addresses to Erin."

"And to find out the exact figure of her *dot*, I presume," put in Mark, laying down his paper on his knee and looking up with a smile. "Is not that one of the most important preliminaries? On the whole, do you know, I agree with Joan."

"Then, I think it is ridiculous of you, Mark; and I beg you will not inform Joan of the fact. All I ask," pursued Lady Tweedale, extending her pretty, plump hands with an expostulatory gesture, "all I ask is, that the poor young man may be allowed fair play. As I told Joan, if Erin does not like him she can say so, and there will be an end of the matter; but I do not wish her mind to be poisoned against him before he has had a chance of making himself known to her."

"I will not poison her mind, certainly, you may rest assured of that; but I confess the idea of a marriage between that yellow-haired Fleming and your charming little Fenian, strikes me as rather comical."

"I am sure I am only anxious to do my duty by the girl," explained Lady Tweedale, in an aggrieved tone. "She will have to marry some time, and Octave Van den Berg is an excellent young man. He is very religious, amiable, and good-tempered—which Erin's husband will have to be, I can tell you—and I call him very good-looking myself. He would make allowances for her excitable temperament, whereas an Englishman would probably be shocked and irritated by it. Altogether," she wound up warmly, "as I really do not consider myself bound to hunt up an Irish Nationalist husband for Erin

—which would appear to be the alternative—I do not think she could find anyone to suit her better than my placid Fleming."

"I don't see why she shouldn't get on with an Englishman," remarked Wimbourne, tilting himself back in his chair, and looking calmly into his aunt's heated face.

"Do you mean to tell me," she began, in an exasperated tone, when she suddenly interrupted herself with a laugh that was both pleased and excited. "Do you know, Mark, I think you are a little bit smitten with her yourself?"

"I am very much smitten with her," agreed her nephew tranquilly.

"Then, my dear boy, I do wish you would marry her—that would be much the best solution of the problem."

"I should as soon think of marrying a whirlwind," replied Mark, in exactly the same tone as before. "Besides, she is too rich for me. Nothing would induce me to marry an heiress. When I do marry, I mean to support my wife, not to allow her to support me."

"My dear Mark, what does it matter on which side the money is, so long as it's there? When people are fond of each other, they don't think about such things. When I married your uncle he was a younger son, and I was supposed to have a fairly good fortune, so I was better off than he; then, when he came into the property, it was a different story; but do you suppose we ever calculated whether he was spending my money, or I was spending his? As a matter of fact," pursued Lady Tweedale comfortably, "I think a woman generally spends her

own money and her husband's too, so you need not have any qualms on that score."

Mark laughed. "That Irish estate of hers would be quite enough to deter me, if nothing else did," he observed. "But I don't mean to marry for years, my dear aunt. Besides, she wouldn't have me," he added, unfolding his paper again.

All that day Joan went about with a little ruffled air which much amused her cousin, and astonished Erin, who was quite in ignorance of the cause; Joan, in accordance with her mother's desire, having refrained from mentioning to her Madame Van den Berg's expected visit. Next morning, however, when Mark was sitting alone in the smoking-room, enjoying a cigarette and the English papers which had just arrived, he heard Joan's voice eager and joyous in the garden.

The small back room appropriated by Sir Edward for his particular use, though narrow and inconvenient enough, possessed one advantage much appreciated as the weather grew warmer with advancing spring, a glass door opening on a flight of steps which led to the garden. The garden in itself, to be sure, was not much to boast of, but a strip of grass in the middle was beginning to show many tender vividly green spikelets among the coarser, darker, square-cropped herbage of last year, and there were crocuses in the narrow borders on each side; there was also a fountain in the middle, a fountain that might have been twin brother with that famous one possessed by Wemmick, which occasionally played "to that extent, that it made the back of your hand quite wet." The sound of the dripping water, faint though it might be, was nevertheless pleasant to the ear.

This particular morning was unusually warm and bright, and Mark has ensconced himself on a rocking-chair close to the open door, pleasantly conscious of the sunshine without, and of a certain spring-like freshness and spicyness in the air, even while he smoked and read.

The sound of Joan's voice attracted his attention more pointedly to outward things. Leaning back lazily in his chair, and laying aside his paper, he gazed out with leisurely satisfaction to the farther end of the garden, where Erin and Joan were now standing. Their figures were thrown into relief by the warm red brick of the wall beyond; the sunshine caught their uncovered heads; wheeling round them, and strutting up and down at their feet were Joan's fantail pigeons. Altogether they made a pretty picture, and Mark took in the details with æsthetic enjoyment. All at once the drift of Joan's excited speech was borne in upon him; in listening to the sound of her jubilant young voice, he had not hitherto attended to the sense of what she said.

"And all the time when I was so cross and so miserable, and so indignant that he should presume to think of you—it was I he wanted! Fancy! I was so relieved that I jumped for joy! Mamma was quite shocked, she thought it was so unfeeling of me."

Mark laughed to himself. "I wonder if Aunt Adela thought as highly of the young man when she discovered that it was her beloved Joan whom he wished to honour with his suit," he mused. The notion tickled him; he could imagine the scene. Lady Tweedale politely interested at first, then mystified, finally indignant. He could fancy the look and air

with which she would convey to Madame Van den Berg that the alliance was out of the question; probably, after the visitor's departure, she had begun to feel compassionate and remorseful—hence the rebuke to Joan, whose exuberant and unconcealed glee at the course affairs had taken had jarred upon her mother's mood.

Yonder in the garden Erin was laughing over Joan's mistake, her laugh was blithe and pleasant to hear, and Mark from his ambush found her face no less pleasant to watch.

"Why, I had only seen him once," she exclaimed.

"Oh, that's nothing," replied Joan. "In this part of the world, the proposal generally takes place first, and the love-making afterwards. But in this case it didn't matter; you couldn't marry a Belgian, could you?"

"I am never going to marry at all, you know," replied Erin seriously.

"So likely," commented Mark to himself.

It was amusing to hear the pretty girlish babble and laughter, and he had no qualms on the subject of playing eavesdropper. If they intended their conversation to be confidential, they should not talk at the top of their voices in the garden.

"Oh, you will some day," returned Joan; "but I hope your husband will be an Englishman."

"Then you will certainly be disappointed," returned Erin with spirit; "nothing would induce me to marry an Englishman."

"And why not, please?" asked Joan with a pout. Mark felt interested in the reply, and raising himself slightly on one elbow, leaned forward to obtain a better view.

"How can you ask?" cried Erin. "If you felt that it would be impossible for you to marry Monsieur Octave Van den Berg, who is very nice and good and charming, simply because he belongs to another race and would probably differ from you on many points, how could I think of marrying anyone whose race was not only different from my own, but antagonistic to mine? Whose ideas would repel me—the mere notion of an English husband makes me shudder!"

Mark frowned as he listened — the girlish talk did not seem so pretty to him now.

"Do my ideas repel you?" inquired Joan, still pouting and injured. "Am I antagonistic to you?"

"Don't talk nonsense," returned Erin caressingly.

"If I were a man," pursued Joan in the same tragic tone, "would you not marry me? I know I should have been in love with you."

Mark smiled again.

"It is difficult to say," returned Erin. "If you had been a man, I should probably never have allowed myself to grow fond of you. As it is, you see, I love you; and though on many points we don't think alike, love makes all the difference."

Mark's cigarette was out, but he kept it absently between his lips, while he gazed intently at the speaker. Her face was turned fully towards him, and as she spoke an expression flashed over it which he had never before seen there. An expression of arch and exquisite tenderness. When his uncle entered, an hour or so later, he found him gazing pensively at the ceiling, and discovered to his immense astonishment that he could give no report as to the contents of the morning papers.

Meanwhile, his relations with Erin were gradually being established on a more and more friendly footing. Sometimes it seemed to her that her first conception of his character had been the right one, and that she had not been mistaken of old in assigning to the companion of her travels a very high place in her esteem. But then she would remember with an impatient sigh the various unpleasant dicoveries she had made since Mark's arrival, and the views to which he had himself given voice. There seemed to be two people in Mark Wimbourne — which was the real character and which the assumed? She studied him with a little suspicious air, which amused him mightily, though he was careful to appear unconscious; being, nevertheless, all the more determined to make her abandon her guarded attitude, and become at her ease with him. His promise of refraining from all discussions which might wound or offend her was strictly adhered to; he even adroitly turned the conversation when it threatened to touch on dangerous topics. Sir Edward, indeed, unable to understand why Mark was so slow in joining in his animadversions against his political opponents, complained that he was getting dull, whereupon Mark smiled ineffably and went on talking about books or the fine arts. On these grounds Erin and he could meet with all safety and sympathy; in truth, she found ever more and more pleasure and interest in their conversations. His advice proved especially valuable where books were concerned. Erin had read widely, but was curiously behind the age in her choice of books. She was almost totally ignorant of the works of modern English writers; and though, as Mark can-

didly confessed, she had not lost much by this abstinence, there were, nevertheless, many authors with whom it was imperative that she should at once become acquainted—Stevenson, for instance, was it possible that she had never heard of Stevenson? Nevertheless, she was to be envied rather than commiserated since she was now to have the joy of reading him for the first time.

Erin, therefore, began at once with "Kidnapped," and went on in quick succession with others of the master's works. Mark declared that she read them too quickly; their full flavour could scarcely be extracted when devoured so eagerly; however, as it gave him the pleasure of discussing them with her, he would not complain.

One day she came down to luncheon a little disposed to cavil at "Virginibus Puerisque," which she was then reading.

"It is too paradoxical," she cried; "he is disingenuous, artificial. *I* think so, at least, though, of course, my opinion goes for nothing. I was angry the whole time I was reading it. His views are distorted—he perverts his beautiful style to the service of a false theory. He himself discourses wittily, and apparently with the utmost candour about truth, or rather the rarity of truth, and yet the whole essay is but a half-truth."

"Which," interposed Mark, "surely proves his case."

"Do you agree with him?" flashed out Erin, turning round upon him suddenly. "Oh, I should hate to believe him—I should hate to go through life doubting and misconstruing people and their motives."

"It cuts both ways," replied Mark. "If you doubt the good, you can also doubt the evil. If your standard is not too high, it can be wider, more tolerant. Everything in this world is a mixture of good and evil."

"But truth surely is the one thing which cannot exist unless it be perfect," cried the girl warmly.

"It depends upon what you call truth. Are we to consider the thing as it is, or as we see it—Joan, would you oblige me by giving me the water? Now, look here, Miss Fitzgerald, look at my hand," suddenly placing it behind the glass jug. "If anybody were to ask you what you saw, you could describe with perfect truth a very large, coarse, ugly, misshapen hand, with a phenomenally rough skin and distorted fingers—the fact would be true. I am sitting close beside you, and you saw my hand with your own eyes through perfectly clear glass and pure water. Nevertheless, my friends would not recognise my hand as thus described. Now, I have given you an object-lesson after the best manner of Mr Barlow, and the moral of it is, that circumstances alter cases, and that much depends on the point of view. It is not always good to rely entirely on our personal judgment."

"Is Mark wanting us to admire his hands?" interposed Sir Edward, looking up from his cold beef. He did not, as a rule, join in any such discussions as the foregoing one, but had caught a stray word here and there of Mark's speech, and chuckled as he saw him push away the jug and hold out for examination his refined and well-shaped hands. "Mark, you are a very fine fellow altogether; I gather that this is the fact you wish to impress upon us."

"Now, papa, that's not fair," exclaimed Joan.

"On the contrary, I always think one of Mark's objects in life is to make himself out worse than he is. I do," she continued vehemently, as her father uttered a derisive "Ho! ho! ho!" and even Lady Tweedale chimed in with a sort of protest, "when Mark does a generous action he tries to do away with the effect by sneering at it. He is always trying to disguise his motives. It all comes from his having such a horror of affectation and humbug. It is all very fine, you know, Mark," she continued, addressing him, "you mayn't want us to think too highly of you, but it makes you a little bit of a hypocrite the other way round."

"Dear me," said Mark imperturbably, "I had no idea I was such a high-minded fellow. I am afraid, Joan, this nobility of mind exists only in your own imagination. Does anyone else here present think I am a hypocrite, noble or otherwise?" His keen eyes wandering round the table rested on Erin, who, piqued by his recent remarks, took up the challenge promptly and boldly.

"Not a hypocrite," she said; "but a little artificial."

Mark gave a surprised laugh; he had not been prepared for this piece of criticism, and was unpleasantly affected by it. He did not reply, however, and Lady Tweedale, with a certain dignified displeasure, took up the cudgels in his defence.

"If by being artificial, my dear," she said, "you mean to refer to certain little affectations and mannerisms which you may have observed in my nephew, I assure you they are not personal to Mark. They belong to the age; young men assume them insensibly; there is a fashion about these things, just as there is in the cut of a collar, or the shape of a hat,"

"This is most instructive and edifying," commented Mark. "Thank you, everybody; I was never before in a position to realise the exact effect I produce on my friends and relations. I am so glad you think my affectations belong to the age, Aunt Adela. And my little Joan thinks me a high-minded hero! Miss Erin considers me artificial. Where is the real man, I wonder? It seems to me you are all looking at me through the water jug."

"You take good care that none of us shall know the real man," cried Joan.

Mark smiled at her across the table, remarking, "little Joan," in a tone which betokened much amusement; but he made no further comment, and the topic was allowed to drop.

In the afternoon, it was proposed that the girls should accompany Sir Edward and Mark in a walk through the Bois de la Canbre. Mark was to leave on the following morning, and had laughingly intimated the desirability of profiting as much as possible of the remaining hours of his society.

They walked four abreast down the Avenue Louise, but, when they reached the woods, they unconsciously paired off; Sir Edward leading the way with Joan, while Mark and Erin followed more leisurely. Sir Edward, who frequently declared that his daily walk in this wood was the only thing which made his present existence tolerable, was now in his glory. He set his hat well to the back of his head, unbuttoned his waistcoat, and, puffing away contentedly at a short and odoriferous pipe, stumped along at a prodigious rate, occasionally halting to point out the beauties of the scenery with his stout blackthorn stick. The occupants of the carriages,

which at this hour thronged the wider avenues of the Bois, and the occasional parties of fashionable folk, who found their way to the less frequented alleys, turned round to stare and laugh at the bluff old Englishman. Many of them knew him, and waved little airy greetings to him in response to the salutations which Joan, with difficulty, induced him to make. It bored Sir Edward amazingly to be obliged to bow first to the ladies, and he flatly refused to take off his hat, as Belgian etiquette prescribed, to any member of his own sex; occasionally he consented to a compromise, consisting of the lifting of two fingers to his hat-brim, accompanied by a scowl, which somewhat astonished the recipients of the attention. More frequently, however, he preferred to drop and pick up his stick, or to look absently in the opposite direction when his daughter warned him of the approach of some of their acquaintances.

Mark, from a distance of twenty paces or so, was much diverted in observing these tactics.

"Was I not wise to propose our following from afar?" he said. "Thank Heaven, no one is likely to guess our connection with my uncle."

"I shouldn't in the least care if they did," responded Erin. "Fine old man! At least, there is no humbug about him."

"My admission is a fresh proof of my artificiality, you think, don't you? You are wrong—if you reflect a little, you will see that, on the contrary, it was prompted by candour. I might have pretended that I only wanted to walk slowly in order to enjoy the undisturbed possession of your society."

"If you had, I should not have believed you,"

replied Erin, laughing; now that she knew Mark better, she could meet these unexpected speeches of his more coolly. "Remember," she continued saucily, "you explained to me long ago that I was not to have any illusions about you. I certainly have none now."

"Are you quite sure?" inquired Mark, suddenly pausing and looking full at her. "You may have different kinds of false ideas, you know. One may have illusions, and one may also have prejudices. I should like you to know me as I am."

He spoke with perfect seriousness, even, as Erin fancied, with some trace of emotion. The fancy was but momentary, however, for he immediately turned to walk on, making some casual remark about not losing sight of Sir Edward and Joan. But Erin had been roused, infected by the earnestness of his tone, and was disposed to push the point a little farther.

"How is it possible to know you?" she cried. "Does not even Joan, your warmest champion, declare that you take pleasure in disguising your real thoughts and feelings? Besides," she added, with increasing irritation, "one can never count on you for two minutes together; you appear quite in earnest about a thing one moment, and in the next you mock at it. You are not in any way reliable, even when you make a promise."

"Come," interrupted Mark quickly, "when have you known me to break a promise?"

"Only to-day," retorted Erin, no less vehemently. "Will you deny that your 'object-lesson' at lunch was intended to reflect upon my political views—which you had promised to avoid discussing? You

wished indirectly to rebuke my prejudice against your party."

"As it happens," he replied quietly, "my motives were much less disinterested and impersonal. I was thinking of myself, and only wished to convey to you that it might be well if you could detach my personality from your preconceived ideas of my opinions and surroundings—if, in fact, you could look on me as the man, your friend, without prejudice."

He once more paused to look at her, this time so kindly that she was affected in spite of herself. But at this interesting juncture the stentorian tones of Sir Edward startled them both. He was adjuring them, in no measured terms, to leave off dawdling miles behind. Joan was getting tired of talking to him, and Mark had the matches in his pocket.

The next morning, Mark Wimbourne went away. He duly said farewell to Erin at the breakfast-table, and was escorted to the *porte cochère* by his relations. Erin, left alone in the dining-room, sat looking somewhat pensively at her untasted tea, when rapid steps sounded in the hall without, and Mark's voice was heard crying, "All right, I am coming directly."

In another moment he entered hastily, crossing the room rapidly to where Erin sat. His handsome face was a little flushed, and he laughed in an odd, agitated way.

"Have you forgotten anything?" inquired Erin, rising, and feeling agitated, too, she knew not why.

He stretched out his hand. "I want to tell you," he said hurriedly, "that I was quite in earnest yesterday when I begged you to think of me without prejudice. That's all—good-bye."

CHAPTER VIII

AN ENGLISH HOME

IT was late on a March afternoon when the Tweedale party arrived at the little country station nearest to their home. This station was actually situated on Sir Edward's property, and a select body of the tenantry were drawn up to receive them on the platform.

"They 're going to give us an ovation, it seems," remarked Sir Edward, thrusting his head through the carriage window as the train slackened speed. "Hallo, Billy! There's Billy! How-do-you-do, Billy?"

A weather-beaten old man, in appearance something between a gardener and a gamekeeper, now appeared, walking alongside of the carriage. When the train stopped, he shoved an advancing porter aside, with a vigorous thrust of his velveteen-clad shoulders, flung open the door, and shot a broad, wrinkled, and not particularly clean hand into the compartment.

Sir Edward grasped it warmly, and Erin observed that he was blinking with both eyes together, and biting his moustache in a manner which, as she had learnt, with him indicated emotion. The big rough hand was next extended to Lady Tweedale and Joan. In reply to Erin's inquiries as to the identity of its owner, Joan cried excitedly :

"It's dear old Billy, our rat-catcher. Wasn't it good of him to walk so far. There are the keepers, and Tom. Papa, do you see Tom? He is not a day older, I do believe."

"I'll see 'em all in time, no doubt," answered Sir Edward gruffly, and still blinking. "Here, get out —get out."

A deafening cheer arose the moment his burly figure emerged on the platform; twenty officious hands were extended to assist in the collection of the small baggage in the carriage. The maid and footman stood by, looking on calmly, while one of the gamekeepers took possession of Lady Tweedale's dressing-bag, and the estate-carpenter shouldered a bundle of rugs. The porters were ignominiously pushed on one side, and the station-master, who had approached with a little complimentary speech of welcome, found that his civility met with but scant attention, so absorbed was Sir Edward in responding to the rough greetings of his own people. These greetings were not by any means all complimentary, as Erin observed; one old fellow informing Sir Edward, with a knowing nod, that he was getting into years pretty well, same as the rest on us, and her ladyship had warsened, too. It was to be expected, wasn't it? While another, sternly considering Lady Tweedale, remarked that she was quite a stranger, and asked what she had been doing over yonder all they years?

The station was prettily decorated with evergreens and flowers, a large "Welcome Home" emblazoned in white letters on a red ground being placed over the doorway. Outside the station, the band of Fletewood village was performing with great vigour and

goodwill, much to the alarm of a fine pair of carriage horses, who were plunging and kicking violently.

Erin at first supposed it was on this account that so many stalwart men presently precipitated themselves upon them, unharnessing them with all possible speed. But when they were led away, she discovered that Sir Edward's "people" intended to convey him and his family home, according to time-honoured custom, by drawing the carriage themselves. She was astonished, perhaps a little disgusted, when the party calmly seated themselves in the horseless vehicle, and, after a resounding cheer, it was rapidly set in motion. To her, there was something revolting in the idea of *men* degrading themselves to such an office; yet, when she looked at Sir Edward's kindly, beaming face, and heard his jovial voice shouting to one or other of convoy or escort, she could detect in him no trace of gratified tyranny, no assumption even of condescension. One stout old fellow in corduroys, who was pushing at the carriage from behind, informed Sir Edward, with a knowing upward jerk of the head, that he was sure he, Sir Edward, was a good ton weight; whereupon Sir Edward responded, in precisely the same tone, that he wasn't going to get out for that.

To Erin, the whole proceeding was new, interesting, and extraordinary. These north-country folk were quite unlike her preconceived idea of the English rustic. They were fine fellows, she owned to herself; their burly, broad-shouldered frames, and open, sunburnt faces were pleasant to look on. It was curious to her to note that after the procession was once fairly in motion, there was no shouting, no throwing up of hats, no extravagant protestations of joy; on the con-

trary, the party proceeded, for the most part, in silence, save for an occasional remark to Sir Edward, or each other, uttered in fine, resounding tones; none of the countenances wore the grin of deference, but were remarkable, rather, for a certain expression of solemn contentment.

After proceeding for about a mile and a half along a road not remarkable for smoothness, and where the progress of repairs was indicated by the placing of large boulders in zigzag fashion, the carriage being whisked past these obstacles with a speed and dexterity which astonished Erin, they came to the park gates. A high wall of creamy, time-worn stone stretched away on either side, the trees of the plantations within being decked with their first exquisite young leafage. On the substantial stone pillars which flanked the wide-open gates, the Tweedale lions grinned affably, extending hospitable paws in greeting to their lord and his belongings. Another triumphal arch surmounted the gateway, and the school children, supported by sundry of the more ancient and decrepit among the villagers, were drawn up beside it; there was a good deal of shrill cheering as the party passed through, redoubling its speed now that it approached its destination. Erin's eyes wandered admiringly from the banks of rhododendrons, gay with bloom, to the rich green of the park itself, and the fine trees which studded it. By-and-by they came in sight of the old-fashioned, rambling house, with its ivy-grown wings, and quaint, irregular windows; on the grassy space in front a crowd awaited them, all Sir Edward's tenants who had not received them at the station or the gate being here drawn up to bid them welcome. A vast deal of din ensued,

and more hand-shaking; then somebody made a little speech to Sir Edward, and he made a little speech himself; then they all began to sing "He 's a jolly good fellow," and beer was served out. At last, with more cheering and many backward looks of real affection and delight at the burly old squire, his enthusiastic adherents dispersed to their several homes.

"And now," said Lady Tweedale, heaving a sigh of relief, "I suppose we may have tea."

During the progress of this meal, which was served in the library, a delightful room with French windows opening on to a garden bright with spring flowers, Joan and her father discoursed excitedly of their various rustic friends; Lady Tweedale occasionally interpolating a quiet comment, while Erin sat silent, feeling puzzled, amused, a little irritated, perhaps, for the existing state of things was one of which, on principle, she disapproved; but nevertheless touched at the warmth and reality of the affection which evidently united people and lord. This curious bond was, no doubt, quite exceptional—in this independent, enlightened nineteenth century, it was an anachronism. A little later on, when she became better acquainted with the place and the people, she was satisfied that her estimation of them was correct. Time had rushed past them, carrying its new customs and advanced ideas elsewhere; here, in their quiet, old-world corner, the easy-going rustic population remained in precisely the same condition as that of their forefathers, spending their placid days in tilling the same soil, stirred only by the same modest ambitions; dazzled by no new hopes, undisturbed by revolutionary theories. Perhaps the strongest characteristic of these rugged north-country folk was their horror of innovations;

what they had always done was good; what their fathers had done was still better, and, when practicable, deserving of imitation; best of all, of course, were the customs in vogue a generation or two still further back, and much honoured and highly appreciated were the efforts of the good folks who endeavoured to keep them up.

A certain quaint, antiquated charm clung to the old Hall and everything about it, which grew on Erin more and more, day by day. Its simplicity, its unusualness, its very ruggedness, made it the more lovable. The house itself was not remarkable for beauty of architecture; the fact that the central part dated from the time of King John had not in any way influenced its successive owners, who had thrown out wings here, gables there, with an entire disregard of unity; within there were rooms of varying heights, and abundance of passages, and little unexpected steps up or down; the whole was eminently comfortable and pleasant. The furniture gave testimony of the same curious medley of tastes and periods; some of it was heavy, and even a little shabby; yet everything seemed somehow to belong to its place, and the connoisseurs who might be shocked by the disparity between a Queen Anne chair and a Georgian sofa found compensation in the contemplation of the beautiful bronzes or the really fine collection of pictures.

Erin took endless delight in wandering among the woods and shrubberies. Fletewood, no doubt, looked its best in the spring; the luxuriantly-growing rhododendrons, covered with bloom, had a beauty hitherto unknown to her; and then the long lines of daffodils, winding like golden snakes alongside the paths, the wild cherry trees in their bridal array, the ferns

and mosses growing none the less freely because a certain attention had been paid to their nurture—all was as unlike the wild grand beauty of Erin's own Irish hills and valleys as could well be conceived, yet they had a certain intimate and homely charm which gained her heart. Then the live things in those woods, the stately pheasants that flew over her head with a shriek and a whirring of wings when her footstep disturbed them—in the clearings innumerable of their progeny were to be seen under the guardianship of certain matronly hens; delicate high-bred things with small heads ever on the alert, and graceful movements; then the birds, and the butterflies, and the little beetles, Erin loved them all. Most, perhaps, she delighted in the little water-hens that frequented the woodland pools; she would sit for an hour together watching them from the bank, laughing under her breath when the tiny chicks dipped their wee heads into the water, apparently under the delusion that they were diving.

These rambles were frequently solitary, for Joan was called upon by her father to accompany him in his peregrinations round the village. They had endeavoured to persuade Erin to form one of the party, but she had declined.

"Why should I intrude upon these people?" she said. "They know nothing about me. You, I suppose, think they belong to you; but I have no right to break in upon their privacy."

"Erin, Erin," responded Joan reproachfully, "why will you be so *farouche*! as mademoiselle would say. Papa and I go and see all these dear old people because they are our friends—well, if we do consider they belong to us, I am not ashamed of it. They

don't mind—they think we belong to them. I want you to come with us as *our* friend, they would be delighted to see you on any day except Saturday, when, of course, I shouldn't dream of taking you."

After a time Erin suffered herself to be persuaded, and, it must be owned, was agreeably surprised by what she saw: the snug houses, the well-filled stack-yards, the trim gardens, the evidences of comfort and well-being perceptible everywhere.

"Ah! Joan, if I could only see my own people at Glenmor as comfortably off!" she sighed one day. "I could have cried when I looked at that old woman's tea-table just now. Did you see how nice everything was? She had buttered toast, and a cake, and some slices of cold bacon, yet you say she is one of the poorest here. When I think of the people at home, with their potatoes and that horrid Indian meal stir-about—and many of them, I daresay, think themselves lucky to get that. And they are so patient, Joan. And here am I, grinding their poor money out of them—never mind, they shall have it back some day. Only two years and a half more, thank God."

"The whole system is so different, isn't it?" observed Joan sympathetically.

"Yes," returned Erin, in a very business-like tone, "I must make radical changes everywhere." And in the contemplation of her cherished plans for the future, Erin forgot the anguish evoked by the sight of Mrs Newton's buttered toast. Sir Edward's colloquies with his tenants were a never-failing source of amusement to her, the bluntness with which each party advocated his own views savoured as little of condescension on one side as of servility on the other.

"You want a back kitchen, I hear," Sir Edward

would growl with a portentous frown. "All of you here in the village are calling out for something or other. There's Dickinson must have a wash-house—and Lovelady says I must re-roof his shippens; you never do a hand's turn for yourselves! What d'ye want a back kitchen for, eh?"

"Well, Sir Ed'ard, the place we'n getten now is nobbut fit for pigs to set in. Theer's scarce room to turn round; and when it's weshin' day, an' our Missus stands a big pot on the fire, we're welly smoored—welly smoored we are, Sir Ed'ard."

"Why don't you use your front kitchen, then?" retorted Sir Edward, still with his brows fiercely knit. Erin had been much tickled at the peculiar metaphor employed by his interlocutor, but he remained absolutely grave. "I never saw such folks as you are! You've got a parlour, which you won't sit in, and a kitchen, which you won't cook in. I must build you a third room forsooth!"

The man thereupon explained, briefly and gruffly, that nobody never reckoned to set i' their parlours, without it were some special 'casion, and that they did use the kitchen, but not for messin' about and cookin', an' they did want a third room terrible bad, an' he reckoned Sir Ed'ard 'ud have to build it for them. After a certain amount of sparring and remonstrance, Sir Edward capitulated, remarking gloomily that Morris was so soft—Morris gave in to them all—what could he, Sir Edward, do? However, he presently relieved his mind by informing a petitioner for the reduction of rent, that if he would eat and drink less and work more, he would probably be able to pay up, and would find himself much better in health into the bargain.

"I 'm pretty well, thank you, Sir Ed'ard," retorted the recipient of this piece of advice. "I should think mysel' a deal waur if I couldn't stoomach my victuals. But I 've allus had a good happytite, thank God—same 's yo'rsel', Sir Ed'ard."

As soon as the Tweedales were fairly established, her ladyship, much to the indignation of Sir Edward, filled the house with guests.

"We must show that we are back," she averred, when he expostulated that he hadn't had time to look about him yet, and didn't want to be entertaining a party. "Besides, it will enliven the girls a little."

Mark Wimbourne was, of course, invited, but could not get away from town. The disappointment of his relatives was great, and Erin was oddly conscious of sharing it. No doubt there was something stimulating about the personality of this young man.

"Godfrey is coming, though," remarked Lady Tweedale, opening the next letter in her budget. "Dear, dear, I wish I could teach the dear fellow to spell. He says he knows we 'll be very disappointed because Poppy can't come — he spells disappointed with two 's's' and one 'p.'"

"He 's coming! that is all right," cried Sir Edward approvingly; "never mind about the spelling—he 's not going to be a literary man like our friend Mark. He 's a good fellow and a capital sportsman. He 'll make a good squire one day, and that 's all one wants."

Erin was rather curious to see this Mr Godfrey Tweedale, who was one day to rule over Fletewood in Sir Edward's stead. She found him very much what she had expected, though she was not quite prepared for his taciturnity. He was a tall, good-look-

ing young man, with gentlemanly manners, and a pleasant smile, which, for the most part, served him in lieu of words. He never by any chance originated an observation, but replied "Yes," or "No," or "I don't think so," with so bright and alert an air that it conveyed the impression of his being an agreeable conversationalist.

"Poppy's smartened him up wonderfully, you know," Joan explained. "He's so much improved since his marriage. She owns it—'Haven't I sandpapered him,' she says."

Erin considered her gravely.

"You know, my dear Joan—you mustn't be offended—but he didn't strike me as being particularly clever."

"Oh! he isn't at all clever," agreed Joan comfortably; "but still, he's improved. He usen't to say anything at all before."

"Do you think," pursued Erin reflectively, "that he has an idea of any kind in his head? I am merely asking for information. Now and then, when nobody is speaking to him, he looks most serious—quite profound, as if he were meditating on the most abstruse problems. Is he, do you suppose, or is he merely, as the children say, thinking of nothing?"

"Oh! he's thinking of something, you may be sure—he's probably wondering if anybody will remember to feed his spaniel, or recalling the last good hit he made at golf. He's very good at golf—he's good at any outdoor pursuit, and wildly popular. The people here adore him."

"I suppose it doesn't matter to them whether he is able to spell or not?"

"If they knew he mixed up his 's's' and 'p's,' I should think it would be an additional bond between them. When he was a little boy, they used to say 'Mester Godfrey's just the same as oursel's.' He's hardy, you know, never cared about rain or cold, and would call out for a 'treacle butty' directly he got into one of their houses. Then he doesn't say much, and they don't say much—they grin at each other and shake hands, and they tell him he's very like the family—that's the real attraction. He's a thorough Tweedale—if you come to think of it, his nose is exactly like papa's."

"I must say your father has five times as much intellect. But then, of course, I don't understand the state of things here. Apparently your people would rather be ruled by a Tweedale without brains than by the very cleverest outsider."

"They certainly would," retorted Joan with spirit; "and quite right, too! The idea of an outsider here! Don't talk of such a thing!"

Erin laughingly shrugged her shoulders and forebore to press the point further.

Though she was as full as ever of high aspirations and serious resolves, she was, for the time being, infected by the light-hearted spirit prevalent in the establishment. She found it novel and pleasant to look on at this gathering, and study the relations of the Tweedales and their guests. She rejoiced to see how popular her friends were, how cordially everyone welcomed them back; it amused her to listen to the prattle of the younger folk, and she was deeply interested in the more serious conversation of the elders. She kept her eyes and ears open, inwardly

taking note of, and criticising all that went on. The approaching General Election was, of course, a theme that was commonly discussed; and, though the remarks which Erin overheard not infrequently roused her hot indignation, she was nevertheless glad of the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the views of her political adversaries. A point which impressed her very particularly was the universal respect and admiration called forth by the ability of Mr Mark Wimbourne. She was quite astonished, indeed, to find that so young a man could exercise a sway so far-reaching and important.

"He will be in the Cabinet some day," remarked one old gentleman, with a knowing shake of the head. "He's a coming man. One of our best speakers—and a long-headed fellow to boot."

No wonder, thought Erin, this important personage should have disdained to discuss politics with her. And yet, with all that cleverness, with his unexampled opportunities, how blind he was, how prejudiced! The word recalled his farewell appeal to her—"Think of me without prejudice!" And her heart smote her. How glad she could have been at the success of her friend, if only—if only, he had not also been her enemy. What an unfortunate fate was that which forbade her to join in the general chorus of appreciation, which forced her to deplore the astuteness and ability that would only be used against the interests of her country. She thought of Mark's face as she had last seen it, so handsome—all the handsomer for that momentary flash of emotion, of his laughing eyes, his smile—with a kind of pain. There was a barrier between them which could never be passed—a gulf which widened day by day. Her pain and irritation

were increased by the discovery that it was owing to Mark's candidature that his seat had been gained to the Conservative party at the last election. Hitherto that particular division of the county had invariably returned a Liberal; several small towns in the district which he now represented had been considered, Erin was informed, "hot-beds of Radicalism." The change was not brought about entirely by his personal influence, or his reputation as a clever fellow, or even by the admirable manner in which his partisans had worked up his cause; but was due largely to the fact of his relationship to the Tweedales. It was well known that old Sir Edward's people were accustomed to vote on whatever side he decided was best for them; and as he was owner of one of the most extensive properties in that part of the world, it may be gathered that this decision of his carried no small weight. Once upon a time, indeed, Sir Edward, like most of his co-religionists, had been a Liberal; but of late years he had changed, or rather, as he was careful to explain when alluding to his political views, the times themselves had changed, and the policy pursued by the Conservatives was as nearly as possible the policy which he had been accustomed to support in his youth. Any of his people who voted at all had followed his lead; but as the elections generally took place at a busy time of the year, when they were getting in their hay, or carrying their corn, a good many of them considered that a visit to the polling booth would involve a considerable waste of time, and a good many more were blissfully unconscious of the fact that they were entitled to vote at all. Sir Edward himself had been a little supine; but when the country was agitated by such burning questions, and when,

moreover, his own nephew had volunteered to stand, it had been a different matter. Sir Edward had convoked meetings, and made speeches, and assiduously canvassed; and Lady Tweedale had instituted a branch of the Primrose League in the vicinity of Fletewood, and all the people whose names ought to be on the register, were immediately enrolled, and altogether they had worked wonders.

Erin could hardly keep quiet over what seemed to her a flagrant reversion of power and influence. She did not agree with Sir Edward's argument, that whatever was right for him must necessarily be right for his tenants. To her his interference seemed an absolute violation of the laws of justice and equity. It was maddening to think that one voice more had been added to the chorus of those who would cry down the rights of Ireland, one more conquest gained over her by such means as these, and to think that if Mark had not profited by his exceptional position, this would not have been. Mark should not admit of such support, he should not stoop to take so base an advantage. When she saw him, he should know her opinion of his conduct—yes, much as he hated her allusions to such matters, he should for once hear the plain truth.

CHAPTER IX

"LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM"

WITH Whitsuntide came a visit from Mark Wimbourne. Mark Wimbourne in a particularly joyous mood, a mood, in fact, of gaiety so contagious that even Erin was insensibly affected by it. It is scarcely possible to continue wrathful with a culprit who was not only utterly unconscious of offence, but evinced the greatest possible pleasure at the sight of his judge, and made open and eager efforts to secure as much as possible of her society. His mood was not only gay, but in a manner soft; one which, as a rule, was rare with him, and perhaps its very unusualness made it the more fascinating. Erin was vexed with herself for being mollified, and endeavoured to rally her stern resolutions, and to regain a sufficient measure of her former indignation to enable her to deliver the lecture which had been so long impending. On the day before his departure the opportunity came. Mark had invited her for a stroll round the woods; Joan had gone out riding with her father, and Lady Tweedale was "busy"—in fact, that good lady had probably her own reasons for not wishing to interrupt the *tête-à-tête*, and Erin was glad to be alone with Mark, for she had that morning registered a weighty resolve to speak her mind to him without further delay.

It was, however, a little difficult to begin. It was

hard to say disagreeable things to a man who was talking in the most delightful manner of matters that were new and interesting. Then the day was so bright, so warm; the north-country air was so invigorating, for all its sunshine; here in the woods it was so delicious—that mist of bluebells yonder looked so cool; out in the open, too, were occasional glimpses of flowering may-trees, creamy or rosy, and laburnums ablaze with gold, while the lilacs dotted here and there along the edge of the plantation, filled the air with their delicate breath—it seemed a kind of desecration to break in upon the universal harmony with jarring words.

When they reached the heart of the woods, however, and seated themselves on a mossy bank which overlooked one of the ponds frequented by the water-fowl, she took her courage in both hands, and informed Mark gravely that she had something to say to him.

"I knew you had," he responded. "It has been weighing on you ever since we left the house, hasn't it? You have answered some of my remarks rather at random, do you know? Well, now, let us hear. You are going to quarrel with me—I am quite prepared for that."

"Yes, I am. I am going to talk in a way that you hate, but I can't help it. I want to tell you things that have been on my mind for a long time—I must talk about them, because I feel it is hypocritical of me to go on treating you as a friend while I think as I do of your conduct."

Seeing the entire gravity of her face, Mark composed his own; then, turning a little more towards her, waited in silence. This silence he preserved,

while Erin, growing rather white, and speaking in tones which trembled in spite of her, enumerated her different causes of dissatisfaction with him.

"I cannot feel," she summed up, "that it was right or honourable in you to take advantage of your exceptional position, as Sir Edward's nephew, to secure for your party a seat which could not have been won by ordinary or fair means. If these village people had been left alone, they would probably have sympathised with the suffering and struggling rural population of Ireland, who are their co-religionists, after all, and they would have endeavoured to help them. I am sure that, if they really understood the state of the case, they would have chosen some one to represent them whose aim would have been the good of Ireland and not the destruction of her interests."

"I assure you," said Mark, "that their present member is genuinely anxious—little as you may believe it—to do Ireland good and to promote her real prosperity——"

"You would do her good in your way, though," interrupted Erin, "not in the way she wants. You would be like the schoolmaster who considers the birch rod good for the child in his power."

"An occasional judicious application of the birch rod is no doubt beneficial," returned Mark calmly; "but your simile is not quite appropriate. Say rather that we refused to put a knife in the hands of the child who is not to be trusted with it. We give it plenty of good meat, but we think it wiser to cut it up for it. I don't think you quite realise all that we have done for Ireland: we will do more yet if Ireland will only behave herself—but now

please, please, let us consider the discussion closed. I assure you, though you may not believe it, there *is* some conscience and honour on our side—we are doing our best, and the result of our efforts will be judged by posterity. You must remember that legislative work resembles builders' work. You cannot judge of the proportions of your tower while it is in course of erection: the day will come when people will admire its height and strength, and appreciate the labours of those who constructed it; but while these labours are in progress, all that each workman must think of is where to place his stone so that it may give solidity to the edifice."

"And now," retorted Erin, "it is your simile which is inappropriate: you are not building up our tower—on the contrary, you have demolished it. You would make of us nothing but a miserable buttress for your own."

Mark smiled, the gratified and approving smile with which he invariably greeted Erin's repartees.

"Well, now, you'll have pity on a poor, tired legislator, will you not? and let him enjoy his holiday in peace. It would be worse than unprofitable to carry on the argument, for we look at the matter from diametrically opposite points of view; however, as we are both perfectly happy in our own opinions, it's all right, isn't it?"

"You will not own that it was unfair of you to make use of your uncle's influence here?"

"My dear Miss Erin, all is fair in love, war, and politics. I consider it a duty to make use of every possible advantage in the interests of my party; my dear old uncle has of late years supported that party, but is naturally a little more active in his exertions

on its behalf, when the enlightened individual who comes forward as a Conservative candidate happens also to be his nephew. As for the good people here, their sympathies are not at all acute, and they concern themselves very little about politics. If my uncle didn't make up their minds for them, somebody else would——"

"They might, at least, have a chance of thinking for themselves," put in Erin hotly. "I call the interference of a landlord, in such matters as these, tyranny."

"Very well, call it tyranny by all means," agreed Mark affably. "Sometimes people rather like to be tyrannised over—there are some very nice tyrants —and there are various kinds of tyranny. One may be tyrannised over, for instance, by an idea, a folly—a thing which, in one's sober moments, one knows to be wild and impossible, and yet which haunts one, rules one, interferes with one in spite of one's common-sense."

He slid a little lower down the bank, so as to sit almost at Erin's feet; his face wore that softened expression which she had noticed sometimes of late, and he spoke gently, almost abstractedly.

There was silence now for a little time, Mark absently picking up pebbles and clods of earth and throwing them into the water, watching the ripples, as they spread and subsided.

"Do you know what it is," he went on at last, "to be tyrannised over by an idea? It may be a very extravagant one. You may own to yourself that it is fantastic, unwise, reprehensible—and yet you would not for worlds be without it. You cherish your tyrant; you succumb more and more to its

sweet sway; you feel it gradually taking possession of you—you know that ultimately it will reign absolute, and will drive you to commit who knows what folly."

He broke off suddenly, throwing a last little pebble into the pool, and gazing at the water until it had become smooth again; then he turned towards Erin. His face was smiling, yet somehow it seemed to be stirred by some indefinable current of emotion.

"Do you know anything about that kind of thing?" he inquired.

"No," returned Erin decidedly, "I can't conceive how anybody of any character could give way to a passion or emotion which he knows to be foolish or wrong."

"Oh, wrong," rejoined Mark quickly, "I'm not speaking of anything criminal—I am speaking of the tyranny of an idea, a desire, a passion if you will, which your reason and good sense may disapprove of; but which, nevertheless, may be too sweet and too fascinating to drive away."

"If it interferes with duty or principle," returned Erin sternly, "I think it should be driven away, in spite of its fascination, and no matter at what cost to oneself."

"Always Antigone, ready for sacrifice," he said, contemplating her with a smile, which had in it something a little sad. There was a pause; then he got up laughing.

"Haven't I been talking nonsense? Shall we go and see the little pheasants now?"

During the remainder of the walk he was unusually lively and amusing, no trace remaining of the curiously dreamy mood which had puzzled Erin.

Yet, during the progress of that summer, she was frequently puzzled by Mark Wimbourne. Sir Edward was also perplexed by the new-found relish for country air suddenly developed by his town-bred nephew; for Mark assumed the habit of running up to Fletewood from Saturday to Monday, and, moreover, invited himself to pass there any spare days that he could snatch from his Parliamentary duties.

Lady Tweedale appeared to be less astonished at these visits, and Joan also discreetly forbore to comment on them. So discreet, indeed, were mother and daughter, so resolutely did they turn the conversation when Sir Edward inveighed against "the oddity of that fellow's popping up and down like that," and so sedulously did they avoid the allusions to Mark's cleverness, prospects, and good qualities, to which Erin had formerly been accustomed, that it at length dawned upon her that they actually thought Mark was growing fond of her. The idea seemed to her, at first, utterly preposterous and ridiculous, and she with difficulty refrained from attacking Joan on the subject; but an odd kind of reserve withheld her. She began to study Mark's attitude towards herself, for the purpose of discovering yet more convincing proofs than those furnished by her own reason and common-sense, of the utter absurdity of her friends' hypothesis; but by-and-by she began to feel a good deal perplexed herself. Mark, undoubtedly, was rather odd in his demeanour towards her; she caught him gazing at her, sometimes, with an expression which made her feel uncomfortable, and though he often laughed with her—he had, indeed, a sense of humour which, she owned to herself, might almost have befitted an Irishman—he never now

made sarcastic comments on what she said, or turned her theories into ridicule.

Once or twice she endeavoured to tempt him into a quarrel, but he only looked at her with his inscrutable smile and declined to respond. He made no secret of his preference for her society; and though, as a rule, a little languid, and not at all averse to being waited on himself—having, indeed, been indulged in this respect by affectionate relations and admiring friends—he showed an eagerness in anticipating Erin's smallest wants, a desire to fetch and carry for her on every possible occasion, which filled Joan with secret amusement.

Erin herself could not help being pleased and touched, and was, moreover, conscious of an occasional thrill of girlish vanity. By-and-by she ceased to see any absurdity in the idea that he was attracted by her, and owned to herself that Mark certainly did like her; and then a notion struck her—a notion which she at first dismissed, but which gradually grew and strengthened. Since Mark Wimbourne liked her, or rather loved her, with evident and ever-increasing devotion, since her power over him was so great, might it not be utilised for the furtherance of those aims which she had nearest at heart. Men had been moved by love, whom no other lever could stir one jot from their standpoint—if Mark, notable, brilliant Mark, could thus be won over to her side—ah, what a conquest that would be! and ah, how she would repay him for capitulating. True love could not exist without union of heart and mind: she would teach him to love her country, her people; together they would make plans, together they would work them out. He should love all that she loved, and in

return, she would love him. She owned to herself that he was worthy of love, not merely because of the charm which was so universally acknowledged, but because of the many noble qualities which she recognised in him. He was upright, generous, large-minded; his ideals were lofty, and he now laid aside the somewhat jealous reserve which had hitherto caused him to hide them under a veil of light mockery. He and Erin had now many discussions, during which he revealed much of his inner self; and the result was that she appreciated more and more this hitherto unknown Mark Wimbourne; and insensibly began to bestow already that which should only have been the reward of the expected concessions. She began to love Mark Wimbourne; and, as it was not in her nature to do anything by halves, she looked forward to their meetings as eagerly as he himself, and passed the days which intervened between his goings and comings in a blissful dream of expectancy.

Matters had proceeded thus far, when, during the recess, it was announced that Mark would address a meeting of his constituents at the Fletewood schoolhouse. All over the country such meetings were being held; the Government would go out in a few months, and politicians were everywhere busy.

Out of regard for Erin's susceptibilities the matter was discussed as little as possible in her presence; Sir Edward, who was at times inclined to forget the discretion urged by his wife and daughter, being hushed up by the latter when hushing up was possible, or having his attention called to other matters. Sometimes Erin wished they would not be quite so considerate. She wanted to know what people were saying and doing, with regard to a subject so vitally

important in her eyes; above all, she longed to find out the exact items of Mark's political programme. But she forbore to ask; the reserve which had kept her from speaking much of Mark to her friends of late asserting itself now with redoubled force. She consoled herself, however, by thinking that she must know all soon; she would hear Mark speak, and he must necessarily make a clear statement of his views. The kind of dread with which she had first looked forward to the approaching meeting was now replaced by feverish expectancy: Mark's demeanour had so much altered of late, he had grown so gentle, had shown himself to be so kind; surely she would detect in his speech some indication of softening towards her country, he would throw out at least some hint of an approaching change. Such a change would, she felt sure, be welcomed by many in his audience. In spite of what the Tweedales might say with regard to the indifference of the Fletewood folks towards the interests of Ireland, Erin was inwardly convinced that the secret sympathies of many were on her side. It might be that Mark would not allude at all to the Irish question, and this tacit avoidance would be, as Erin joyously told herself, a good sign.

Mark arrived late on the afternoon preceding that on which the meeting was to take place, and Erin had no opportunity for private conversation with him before dinner. Afterwards, however, when they were drinking their coffee in the garden, he asked her if she would take a turn with him. She agreed, with an alacrity which was as flattering as unexpected. What would she not have done for him at this juncture? Each fresh proof of his devotedness made her thrill with tremulous hope; she must make the most, she

told herself, of every opportunity for establishing her empire more firmly; the moment was fast approaching when she should judge of the real extent of her influence.

So they paced away together in the moonlight towards the woods, which smelt aromatic in the warm summer air; from distant marshes they could hear the low sweet piping of a reed-warbler, and nearer at hand the occasional tinkling of sheep-bells in the neighbouring fields; nearer still, the whirring wings of a startled pheasant, the boom of a beetle, the faint call of a bat. Amid all these sounds the woods were very silent, the rustle of Erin's draperies over the path and the rhythmical fall of Mark's footsteps alone breaking the stillness. Neither spoke until they reached a kind of little clearing in the woods, in the midst of which was a small enclosed garden with a summer-house. Within the high yew hedge, which shut in the garden from profane eyes, there was a tiny lawn of velvet smoothness, all silvered with dew to-night, and beds of flowers, intoxicatingly sweet. Entering the summer-house, they sat down, one on each side of the rustic table, and looked at each other for the first time since they had left the garden. Mark's face was white, Erin thought, or was it the moonlight? And was it the shadow of the shifting leaves that, as he bent forward, made it look so strange?

"You are very silent this evening," said Erin, with a little tremulous laugh. If she could only conquer her stupid shyness, surely now would be her time to plead, to promise; she knew that Mark loved her very much, could he refuse her anything that she might ask? But when her little laugh had died away, she found herself for the moment tongue-tied.

Was it, indeed, the shadow of the leaves, or was it fancy? It seemed to her that those long slim fingers of Mark's shook as they absently tapped the table. Why did he not speak?

At last, with an impatient sigh, followed almost immediately by a smile, he said, "Perhaps I am nervous!"

"You are thinking of to-morrow, I suppose," returned Erin. "You will have to make a long speech —what are you going to say?"

"Do not let us talk about my speech," he said, "I want to be happy to-night. Let us talk about something more interesting; let us talk about—love."

"Is not that rather a difficult subject to choose?" inquired Erin, after a little pause. She endeavoured to assume a casual air, but he saw the tremor of her eyelids and noticed the fluttering of the soft laces at her bosom.

Mark leaned back so that his face was in shadow, though those nervous hands of his told their own tale. The tone of his voice, however, when next he spoke, was calm and deliberate as ever.

"I think it will be interesting," he said, "for two people, so exceedingly unlike as we are, to compare notes on a subject which interests everybody."

"Is it not said that nowadays there is no such thing as love?" remarked Erin.

"Yes," returned Mark in his tranquil, measured way; "but you do not believe that—and neither do I."

"I should like to hear your theory first," she said, looking shyly towards the dim outline of his face.

"My theory? Well, I think love is a disturbing sort of thing—a force before which even those who have most prided themselves on their strength of

mind and will, find themselves powerless. In fact, the words of the old ditty describe it most accurately:—

'Love, love, love, love, love, it is a dizziness,
Won't let a poor man go about his business!'

It's perfectly true—love upsets one's plans, and destroys one's calculations; love is distracting, irre sistible, and delightful!"

"If it is so mischievous, how can it be delightful?" inquired Erin, endeavouring to speak lightly, though Mark, from his ambush, took note of the timid incredulous joy in her face. He paused a moment before replying.

"One of its strangest attributes is that the mere fact of its existence compensates one for its destructiveness.'

"Not always, surely?"

"Not always, perhaps—I am speaking of a happy love—or, perhaps, I should rather say"—with a quick tender change of tone—"of a hopeful love. It brings delight in itself, and the expectation of greater delights to come."

Both were silent for a moment, and then Erin said tremulously:

"I am glad you think that love, true love, should work a revolution in people's lives. I—I think so myself. A great, strong, real love should be generous; it should lead one to give up much that one has hitherto cherished to—to—how shall I say it? To identify one's self so entirely with the beloved, that one's interests become the same, one's ambitions the same. Ah, it is true," she continued eagerly, gaining confidence as she warmed with the subject, "love teaches one how to do all this. It—it is even sweet to conform one's ideas to those of the loved one! What seemed impossible before becomes all at once

easy — one seems to finds one's eyes suddenly opened——"

Mark had leaned forward again, his face so transformed in its sudden eagerness and ardour that it was for a moment scarcely recognisable. He had stretched out his hand, he had opened his lips to speak, when of a sudden, with a duet of noisy delighted barks, two great black retrievers rushed into the enclosure, and before the couple had recovered from their startled dismay, Sir Edward's heavy step sounded on the little path.

"Come here, Turk, you are breaking all the nicotinas! Get out, Sweep, you great clumsy brute! Go to heel! Hullo, Mark, you 're a nice young man, cutting off like this, and leaving me to smoke my pipe all by myself! And what are you doing here, Erin? Laying in a stock of rheumatism, I should think. Why, she hasn't got a thing over her shoulders! You might have got her a shawl or something, Mark."

"I am quite warm, thank you," returned Erin—Mark, for once, seemed to have no words ready —"you see it is so sheltered here."

"Yes, it is a nice little place—the Folly of Fletewood, my father used to call it. We built it when we were youngsters, my brother and I, and it has been uncommonly useful; but he never could see what we wanted with it, and it made him very angry. I rec'lect," continued Sir Edward, seating himself beside Erin, and leisurely filling his pipe, "I rec'lect once——"

Here Mark heaved an impatient sigh. When his uncle said, "I rec'lect," in that tone, it meant they were in for a long story. Erin and he would have no further opportunity of comparing theories that night.

CHAPTER X

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP

GOOD-NATURED, unconscious Sir Edward, who had already so unwittingly put an end to an interesting situation, seemed determined to postpone as far as possible all further developments of it. He had so much to say to Mark in the morning that the latter had no chance of snatching even a few moments' conversation with Erin, and as several politicians of the neighbourhood, including dignitaries of the Primrose League, were invited to lunch, the duty of entertaining them devolved chiefly on Mark; and the meeting itself was to take place at three o'clock.

But Erin scarcely felt that she stood in need of an explanation; surely what Mark had said on the previous night was tantamount to a confession. Incredible, impossible, as it might seem, she had evidently conquered: love had worked a miracle—Mark was won over to her side. The strong man had owned his weakness. The Samson was shorn of his locks, and she herself was the Delilah by whose hand the deed had been accomplished. No, no, laughing to herself joyously over the comparison, hers was a nobler mission than Delilah's, for she had not deprived her giant of his strength, but turned it to a nobler purpose. Ah! what would they not accomplish together! When would the opportunity

come for speaking clearly to each other, planning great work to be undertaken in the future? Blissfully, deliriously happy as she was in the present state of things, content to rest in the contemplation of this unlooked-for change, she could not but await with eager anticipation the moment when Mark should claim his reward, and she should give it. Meanwhile, a strange, sweet shyness took possession of her; she found it difficult to speak to Mark, and scarcely dared to look at him; but she noticed that he, too, though he was better able to disguise his emotions, was a little unlike himself. He looked a little dreamy, and answered occasionally at random; once or twice his eyes met Erin's, and he smiled at her in a way which made her quickly drop hers.

After lunch he managed to snatch a moment with her.

"This evening we must finish our conversation," he said; "this time we must not be interrupted. Meanwhile, you have made me happier than I can express —I dared not hope so much. Ah! there is Uncle Edward again! I must go, I suppose. One thing I must make sure of—you will not go to the meeting to-day?"

"Not go to the meeting?" cried Erin, much taken aback. "Oh, I must go to that—I have been looking forward to it—I must hear you speak."

Sir Edward was standing outside the window now, shouting in stentorian tones.

"In a minute, Uncle Edward," cried Mark, a little irritably. "No, Erin, I beg you not to come—as a favour to me—it would be too trying. Yes, Uncle Edward," as the old baronet's face, more ruddy than usual in consequence of his exertions, was now thrust into the room. "I 'm here, I 'm coming!"

"They are all waiting, you know," explained Sir Edward. "They want me to make a speech to start 'em, but I 'm not going to begin unless you are there to back me up. Dixon says he 's got to catch the 5.40 to Liverpool, so you 'll have to look sharp. Here, come on — jump out of the window — that 's the quickest way." Mark obeyed, turning to give a farewell glance and smile to Erin, and in another moment she was alone.

What did he mean by asking her not to be present at the meeting? Why, she of all others most naturally desired to be there. He looked as if he meant what he said: he had spoken persuasively, even urgently, he had asked for her compliance as a favour to himself. Well, there were few favours which she would refuse Mark Wimbourne, but this she could not grant. She could not, without making herself very remarkable, fail to put in an appearance that afternoon; she had several times announced her intention of being present—moreover, she wanted to be present—she could not keep away. She would choose an inconspicuous place, so that he might perhaps be unaware of her presence, which, doubtless, he feared might make him nervous. It could, of course, be for no other reason that he had asked her to keep away. "It would be trying," he said. Doubtless he felt it already sufficiently difficult to formulate the change in his opinions, to confess the eradication of his former prejudices. Oh yes, she would be very quiet, she would squeeze herself into a most retired corner—but she must be there. She must hear and see him—in fact, she felt as though an irresistible force was drawing her—she could not keep away!

The schoolhouse was crowded to overflowing when

she entered, and she took advantage of the fact to steal unobserved to a corner opposite the platform, where she entrenched herself behind a knot of sturdy electors, who, pending the arrival of the speakers, were discussing the condition of the crops. She could not long, however, congratulate herself upon her seclusion; for when, presently, Sir Edward and his party appeared upon the platform, the audience seated themselves, or obligingly flattened themselves against the wall, in preparation for the coming oratorical treat; and Erin's whereabouts was consequently discovered by Joan, who promptly jumped down from the platform, and making her way through, insisted upon piloting her back to the same elevated position. Erin stole an uneasy glance at Mark, who was watching their progress, but his face betrayed nothing. He was a little paler than usual, but was talking pleasantly to his neighbours on the platform. Erin almost wished that she had not come—he would perhaps be angry with her—and she was humiliatingly conscious of a dread of his anger. Oh, love did indeed work strange revolutions! She, who had cared so little what anyone said or thought of her, who had, above all, prided herself on her independent attitude with regard to Mark, now secretly palpitated lest this first act of disobedience might provoke his displeasure. Yet, was it not natural, after all? Had he not himself owned to the extent of love's power? No one could say that Mark was weak or easily influenced.

By-and-by the speeches began; Sir Edward, being extremely colloquial and communicative, and his audience, at all times appreciative of his remarks, becoming quite enthusiastic when he reminded them

of their privilege in being represented in Parliament by a person of such high qualities as his nephew. The speaker who followed alluded, in the same strain of eulogy, to the excellent work already accomplished by Mr Wimbourne, and to the still more valuable assistance which he would render to his party in the future. Erin listened with growing irritation to the orator's forecast of the programme likely to be undertaken by this party, and was conscious of fierce irritation over his contemptuous reference to the unreasonable demands of the Irish faction, which it would be the duty of Unionists to combat and repress. She controlled her wrath, however, on reflecting that this was merely a party war-cry, and no real indication of Mark's personal views. These he would presently define for himself — would he be silent on the subject of Irish affairs? Silence at this date would be pardonable and even natural, the time was perchance not yet ripe for the disclosure which must so much astonish his hearers. Or, would he speak out boldly even to-day? Mark was not a cowardly man, though he was a prudent one. Oh, how she would love him, if for her sake he threw even prudence to the winds to-day!

Now it was his turn; he smiled pleasantly as he stood for a moment facing the audience. Erin gazed at him with a glow of admiration. How handsome he was, how graceful, how much at ease. This was a lover to be proud of. She listened breathlessly when he began to speak. There was no doubt about his possessing all qualifications necessary to an orator; his voice was well modulated, his de-

livery excellent, his words carefully chosen without being pedantic. Then the power of the man! He had scarcely spoken a few sentences before it made itself felt. He was not only lucid, decided and original, but persuasive. He possessed that rare gift—valuable to a man in any walk of life, priceless to an orator—of personal influence; he was not only in touch with his audience, he carried it along with him.

Erin heard him at first with the same kind of artistic pleasure with which she would have listened to good music or fine poetry; but by-and-by it became clear to her that the views which Mark was actually expounding were identical with those advocated by the organs of his party. She could hear *him* speak of them without impatience; she could even bear to see how he roused and excited those who heard him. In some regards it was evident that he was not changed; still, if he were converted—as he had so plainly hinted last night—on *the* point she had most at heart, nothing else mattered. She did not, however, quite like the tone of light irony in which he alluded to some of his political opponents, or the manner in which he ridiculed and tore to pieces the theories advocated by them.

The first part of his speech was concluded, and he paused for a moment, Erin watching him with a rapidly beating heart. Then he resumed:—

"With regard to the future, the first question which presents itself must necessarily be that of our attitude towards Ireland."

He paused again, and for a second his eyes met Erin's eager and unconsciously entreating glance.

He looked away immediately and went on. He was certainly paler than usual, and his face had assumed a set look, but his voice did not falter, nor his intention waver; and soon all Erin's hopes were ruthlessly shattered. He did not now, as before, speak lightly and sarcastically; but he stated his case with a directness and decision that could not be mistaken. It seemed to Erin that he was pitiless. He discussed and dismissed the claims and hopes of Ireland in a few brief but pregnant sentences. He announced emphatically his intention of upholding the Union of the Empire by every means in his power, and enumerated his reasons for the maintenance of this principle so clearly, so persuasively, that Erin was maddeningly conscious of the conviction which his words must carry to his hearers.

By-and-by he turned to other matters, but she heard no more of what he said, though she still sat gazing at him with fascinated eyes. Ah, those eyes were open at last—she saw clearly what he was—a man of iron, of marble! She might, indeed, as well have attempted to mould iron or marble with those soft, eager little fingers of hers, as to make an impression on the fixed determination of this man! Oh, what a fool she had been—what a blind fool! She understood all now—all his talk of love, and the power of love, and the changes which it might effect were meant to apply to *her*. It was she who was to change, who was to give up her convictions, to suffer her principles to be swept away. Good heavens! and in her innocence she had encouraged him to hope for this, the very words which she had spoken last night had confirmed him in his fancied triumph.

Oh, when would he have done speaking! When would he give her the opportunity of convincing him of his mistake! it was not tolerable that he should go on thinking for another hour, another moment, that she was a renegade, a deserter. She must be patient for a little while, of course; but when the time came, she would prove to him that women could have principles as well as men, that they could be as steadfast, as determined. She would show him that he was mistaken in thinking that for his sake she would abandon her sacred cause. For his sake, forsooth! How secure he had been, he had not even been at the pains to disguise this confidence, he had almost told her to her face that she loved him. Love him! Love the enemy of her country! Oh, she would soon undeceive him. Let her have but five minutes to speak her mind, and then she would never look upon his face again. As she gazed at him now, a sudden passion of anger, of resentment, of something that was almost despair, came over her. She felt as if she hated its very beauty—she hated that airy, genial manner—it was hatred, surely hatred and loathing which made her suddenly feel she could not bear to look on it, that if she listened a moment longer to the tones of that sweet and penetrating voice she would go mad. She rose, intending to hasten from the place, but a sudden dimness came before her eyes, Mark's voice seemed to boom in her ears; she swayed, and would have fallen, but that Joan caught her; she had fainted.

When she came to herself, she was lying on the grass in the school garden; Lady Tweedale and Joan were bending over her, and someone was supporting her head. After a moment or two she

became conscious of the identity of this someone, and struggled into a sitting posture.

"You had better go back and finish your speech," she said, turning towards him eyes which, for all their fierceness, looked pathetic in her white face.

"I have finished my speech," returned Mark. "I will go back presently; you must let me take you home first."

"Joan will take me home. I would rather you did not come. I can walk quite well; I am all right now. It was only the heat," she added defiantly.

Mark said nothing, but assisted her to rise; then, seeing how weak and trembling she still was, he drew her hand quietly through his arm.

"Walk on the other side, Joan," he said. "I think it is better for me to come with you—you will get home more quickly." Not choosing to take Joan into the secret by provoking an explanation then and there, Erin submitted, and the little party moved slowly on, Lady Tweedale bringing up the rear, lamenting, and endeavouring to assign a cause for Erin's indisposition.

Erin was absolutely silent, she was annoyed at being obliged to accept Mark's assistance, and still more annoyed with herself for being so much agitated by his proximity. It was, however, some small comfort to her to realise, as in some indefinable way she did, that he was as much agitated as she. As they paced along side by side, there came a sudden poignant recollection that only a short time ago she had found his companionship sweet, she had counted on the lifelong support of that strong arm, she had longed for the moment when she should put her hand trustingly into that which now hung so limp

and unexpectant! And now the parting must come —absolute and for ever.

He left her when they reached the house, and Joan escorted her upstairs to her own room, while Lady Tweedale hurried away to give directions for her well-being. Joan contemplated her for a moment after she had lain down on her bed, and then bent over her.

"Erin, what is it? I cannot bear to see you look like that. It isn't the heat, of course. You are angry with Mark. You didn't like his speech?"

"How could I like his speech?" returned Erin. "O Joan — there, don't let us talk about it. You could never understand what I feel."

"But, my darling child," expostulated Joan, sitting down on the bed beside her, and opening her eyes very wide, "what could you expect? On these occasions, Mark is bound to say what he thinks right, and I assure you he—he really was very moderate to-day. Really and truly, Erin, he said as little as he possibly could—just because you were there."

"How kind of him!" remarked Erin; and then she closed her eyes, and refused to say another word until Lady Tweedale came in. By-and-by, when the two had withdrawn and she was left in the solitude for which she craved, she tried to realise the full extent of the calamity which had befallen her. She did not hate Mark Wimbourne; the quarter of an hour's walk from the school to the house had convinced her of the fact that she loved him only too well. Surely no greater misfortune could have befallen her. To love a man with her whole heart,— to feel that life without him would be absolutely blank and savourless, and yet to know that between

them was an impassable barrier. She had deluded herself with the idea that Mark would of himself remove this barrier! Well, he had to-day shown her unmistakably how utterly vain was the hope. He stood on the other side with folded arms and invited her to come over. That was his attitude. How was it that she had not seen it? "What could you expect?" Joan had asked. What, indeed! Knowing the man as she did, how had she failed to realise that it was useless to look for concessions from him? She had given her heart away, placed all her hopes of happiness in the most impossible quarter. Meanwhile, Mark was no doubt quite unconscious of her anguish; he must, indeed, in some measure realise that his speech had caused her pain—had he not in truth endeavoured to avert it by requesting her to stay away? But she was quite convinced that he was confident of her unshaken affection, her ultimate submission to his will. The affection, alas, was still there—she was not of those who bestow or withdraw their love easily—but the submission! On this he had reckoned somewhat rashly. He would find himself mistaken in his calculations. Oh, she must have an end of it all, and quickly. She would be better able to face her life when the misunderstanding was cleared up, the words, which must irrevocably part them, spoken.

After an hour's fevered tossing on her pillows she sent for Joan.

"Has everybody gone away?" she asked, sitting up and looking at Joan with an expression that startled her. "Where is Mr Wimbourne?"

"Thank heaven, they are all gone, and Mark is enjoying a quiet cigarette in the garden. How

shockingly ill you look, Erin! Do lie down and rest till dinner-time."

Erin had got off the bed, and was beginning with hasty, trembling hands to arrange her dress.

"I can't rest. I want you to do something for me, Joan. I want you to take me to some room where I am certain of being undisturbed, and tell your cousin, Mr Wimbourne, that I want to see him there."

"Erin, Erin," cried Joan, throwing her arms round her, and kissing her hot cheeks, "do not take everything so grievously to heart! What a state you have worked yourself into over these few words of Mark's! Indeed, I shan't let you see him—you are not fit for it. Surely his scolding will keep till another day!"

"I will see him," cried Erin, with a little stamp of the foot. "If you won't do as I ask, I shall go out into the garden and make him come into the woods with me; but I would much rather see him in the house, because when I have said what I want to say, I can go away at once."

"Well, well," agreed Joan, "you must have your own way, I suppose; but don't excite yourself too much. There is the old schoolroom—nobody ever goes there except me; you will have it all to yourselves. You know, at the top of the flight of steps near the green-room. If you can find your way there, I will fetch Mark."

In another moment or two Erin was in possession of the room alluded to; she never entered it afterwards without a kind of horror. And yet, it was a cheery little place, bright with flowers, and with a bird cage in the window. As Erin stood waiting, the sound of the little bird's claws, as he hopped from perch to perch, grated upon her over-wrought nerves;

she flung a cloth over the cage fiercely, desiring the astonished little creature to be still.

Presently she heard Mark's steps on the stairs without, and her heart beat so violently that she felt as though it must suffocate her. She composed herself, however, and looked steadily at him as he entered. He was a little grave, but otherwise looked much as usual.

She was standing by the window, one hand resting on the sill. Mark drew near and placed himself opposite her.

"I am glad you sent for me," he began; "I have a great deal to say to you. First of all, I want to tell you how grieved I am that any words of mine should cause you pain. I feared that what I had to say this afternoon might hurt you, and you know I wanted you not to come——"

"Most considerate of you," interrupted Erin. She was glad that he inaugurated matters thus, glad to be able to feel angry with him. She paused a moment, and then went on, "There has been a mistake, a misunderstanding,—but it can be cleared up in a few minutes. It is not the accident of my hearing what you had to say this afternoon that is of importance, but the fact of the attitude indicated by your words."

"Surely," he said very quietly and seriously, "you were always aware of that attitude. Though we have not—*quarrelled* so much of late—" with an almost caressing emphasis on the word—"my opinions were perfectly known to you."

The colour rushed to Erin's face, but she looked at him fearlessly. It was better to be explicit, let it cost her what it might.

"I was in hopes," she said, "that of late you had changed. You have been so different—and last night when we were talking, I thought you—you intended me to understand——" She broke off suddenly, and turned away her head. "I see my mistake now," she added hastily.

"It was a mistake," he said gently. "I, too, have been mistaken. I hoped that you might be won round to my way of thinking." He paused, seeing her lip quiver, and guessing that it was painful to her to be reminded of the unconscious encouragement which she had given to this hope. "In fact," he went on, "we have both been at cross purposes! But never mind—let us clear up the misunderstanding now—let us both speak out our minds plainly; what I have been trying to convey to you lately, and particularly last night, is the fact that I love you."

He paused a moment, his face wonderfully soft, and yet wearing a smile, half gay, half tender.

"Now, I did not want to love you—I was prejudiced against you; everything about you—yes, I will own it frankly, was antagonistic to my ideas. You have none of the qualifications which I conceived essential to my future helpmate, you will in no way fit the place I had marked out for that hypothetical personage. But you are the only woman in the world for me—I love you, and I cannot do without you."

He stooped as he spoke, till his eyes were on a level with hers, his face was alight, eager, ardent.

"I am not the man you would have chosen, I know," he went on, as she did not speak; "and yet, my sweet, I think you love me! We are both the victims of fate—let us make the best of it."

Erin drew back, forcing herself to look steadily at him; it was harder, much harder, than she had expected, to be stern and ruthless when he spoke thus. Her anger had melted away. She did not even feel humiliated by his assurance.

"I don't think you quite understand what you propose," she said at length. "A union between us is out of the question, it—it is simply impossible. We are as much apart as the poles. It would be misery."

"No, no," said Mark, still undamped; "you are wrong, it would be very great happiness. I do not say that we should agree — on the contrary, we should quarrel perpetually — I am quite prepared for that! But we should make it up, Erin, and the makings-up would be sweeter than the quarrels. You would drive me mad a dozen times a day; but I would rather be maddened by you than soothed by any other woman."

"Oh, what folly," cried Erin passionately; "do you not see that it is folly? How could you love me if I drove you mad? How could I love you, knowing that the aim of your life would be to make war against all that I hold dear—to overthrow what I would set up. You have this day declared yourself the enemy of my country—how could I love you?"

"In theory, indeed, it sounds impossible," returned Mark; "but the fact remains the same—you do love me. Come, let us make a compact—let us agree to differ. You shall go your way — you shall manage your own affairs, and make ducks and drakes of your own property—ah, you do not know how much I object to that property of yours! But I have no doubt that you will get rid of it all

in time. Then, can you not make up your mind to take me as I am—to let me follow my own wrong-headed line, and do what I, in my misguided way, think to be my duty!"

Despite the characteristic note of banter in his tone, it was so persuasive, so winning, that Erin could not resent it. Moreover, there was that in face and manner which conveyed to her the consciousness of the depth and reality of his passion. But she rallied her strength of will and answered firmly:

"I will not deny that I love you, and that it will make me very unhappy to part from you; but I should be far, far more unhappy as your wife, feeling as I do. Besides," she added, with gathering heat, "I should think it dishonourable to take the name of one who is pledged as you are, to associate myself with you, to be identified with you. I should feel in a way perjured. No, it is useless to dream of it. Marriage between us two would only be possible if one of us yielded."

"And it would be quite impossible for you to yield?" he queried, speaking very quietly. "You prefer to spoil both our lives. And yet, Erin, what is it that keeps us apart? Is it not, after all, a fancied barrier? You are sacrificing yourself and me to a mere prejudice, an idea. My dear child," insensibly assuming his customary airy tone—a tone oddly at variance with the expression of his face—"do you suppose it rests with me to make or mar your country? Remember, I am but a unit. I have pledged myself to maintain certain principles, and I must stand firm to what I believe to be right; but, I assure you, you attach more importance to my personal action than is at all necessary."

"It is enough for me to know that you use what power you have against us," cried Erin vehemently. "You will have more power by-and-by—everyone says you will. But it is not merely that, there is a personal feeling, too—how could I bear to think that my husband was my antagonist? Is it not a farce to talk about not interfering with me? How do you suppose I could be happy, knowing that you were opposed to all my aims—feeling that—that you disapproved——"

She broke off suddenly, for the expression of Mark's face startled her. He was, indeed, so much moved by this naïve indication of her feelings, this unconscious confession of her susceptibility to his influence, that he with difficulty withstood the temptation to gather her in his arms there and then.

In a moment the thought came to her that her weakness might also be her strength. Her last words had made more impression on Mark than anything she had yet said. She suddenly stretched out her hands to him, looking in his face with desperate appeal—

"O Mark, why should *you* not yield, if you really love me as you say? You cannot feel as I do!"

He had caught her hands, but now he let them go.

"After all," he exclaimed, with a little proud toss of the head, "there is such a thing as honour!"

"Well, then, nothing remains for us but to part," cried Erin bitterly.

She felt as if her heart were bursting within her, but she would not stoop to plead further.

"So be it," said he coldly; and turning, went out of the room without another glance at her.

CHAPTER XI

"THE TEAR AND THE SMILE"

ABOUT a fortnight later, Erin stood on the deck of the mail steamer *Connaught*, straining her eyes towards a faint grey line in the distance. She had been so much upset by recent events, and, moreover, her presence at Fletewood just then was so exceedingly awkward, that Lady Tweedale had yielded to her entreaties for permission to pay a visit to Ireland. Both Sir Edward and Lady Tweedale were feeling a little hurt with Erin, a little aggrieved at her unexpected rejection of their nephew. It was most unaccountable, they thought; any other girl in her place would have considered herself lucky in securing such a prize — Erin herself had at first appeared well pleased at the turn affairs were taking. And then, all of a sudden, for no reason at all—or for a reason so foolish that it did not deserve to be credited with a name, she must needs refuse this very desirable alliance, making herself miserable, as was plain, and everyone else uncomfortable. As for Mark—he did not talk about it—that was not his way; but Lady Tweedale was sure he was very much cut up. Joan, of course, took Erin's part — she always did; but even she was sorry and surprised. Besides, the actual condition of affairs required Mark's constant presence at Fletewood, which was necessarily his headquarters during his political cam-

paign. After what had happened, it was, of course, difficult and painful for him to meet Erin; therefore, when the girl proposed to pay a long-promised visit to Mrs Riley, Lady Tweedale had acquiesced.

It was not yet five years since she had stood gazing towards that faint line, with her childish heart breaking within her as she watched it grow fainter and fainter; but it appeared a lifetime. Yet, for four of those years time had, in a manner, stood still with her, and she had herself—except for the development brought about by growth and education—scarcely changed. But the last few months—what had they not brought to her, what mischief had they not wrought within her!

The dim outlines yonder were gradually assuming shape and colour, she was beginning to distinguish the hills—she almost thought she could make out Dalkey Island. There, before her, was Ireland. And her eyes were dimmed by no happy tears, her heart felt cold and dead within her! The nearer she approached the term of her journey, the greater was her sense of desolation.

Now the mountains stood out, the familiar beloved shapes which had been the guardians of her childhood; and the heaviness which had seemed to overpower body and spirit alike gave place suddenly to a sharp, almost intolerable pain. She remembered her vow, as she looked upon them last; she had called herself their child, and sworn to return to them steadfast and unchanged. And now! O faithless child of Erin that she was, degenerate daughter of the patriot who, with his last breath, had dedicated her to their country, she was returning, broken in spirit and weary at heart, returning without joy,

without enthusiasm, because the love and devotion which she had meant to bestow exclusively on her mother-land had been stolen from her by a stranger —an enemy! True, she had made the sacrifice, but it was no holocaust: it was but a half-burnt offering. She had dismissed Mark—she did not repent of it: she would do it again if it were necessary, but she could not rid herself of the haunting remembrance of his face, his voice, things which he had said; of a yearning for his presence at times almost unendurable; now and then she would indulge in wild, foolish fancies of what would have happened had matters been otherwise. The old dream of winning him over to her cause had become too painful to be dwelt upon; but, supposing he were not interested in politics, supposing even she herself were just an ordinary happy girl—a girl without any mission in life, free to choose for herself, to bestow her love where she would . . . . oh, these thoughts were very dangerous, and Erin felt humiliated and degraded by them, and would rebuke herself severely, and endeavour to brace herself up, formulating anew the resolve to live henceforth solely for her country.

The *Connaught* at length entered the beautiful harbour; the passengers were crowding on deck, one of them making her way towards Erin. This was the maid whom Lady Tweedale had insisted on sending with Erin, a former attendant of her own, on whose discretion she could rely, and who would, as she informed Erin, be at least a kind of link with civilisation. Erin had at first refused her companionship, knowing that the damsel in question would be quite out of place at Ballinagall Farm; but Lady Tweedale had been obdurate, and the girl had finally

acquiesced, announcing Jennings' arrival to Mrs Riley, however, with some trepidation.

Jennings was a staid and starched elderly female, with a face at all times solemn, but now absolutely funereal. It was, at the moment she approached Erin, of a pale lemon-colour in complexion — for the first duty of the self-respecting British abigail on crossing the Irish Channel is to be violently sea-sick, and Jennings had accomplished it with particular conscientiousness.

"I 've got the rugs here, miss," she remarked in melancholy tones; "but the dressing-bag 's that 'eavy I was obliged to give it to a man down there. I didn't reelly feel myself equal to carrying it."

"Of course not," agreed Erin absently; "it will be all right if you 've given it to a porter."

"I don't know if he was a porter, I 'm sure, miss. I think he was a cabbing-boy, but reelly I was that hill I couldn't inquire. I don't see him anywhere now, miss," she added hopelessly; "but I suppose he 'll carry it on deck. He said he would, but I don't know."

"Oh, it 's sure to be all right," repeated Erin vaguely. "You will recognise him when you see him."

"Indeed, miss, I can't say, reelly," responded Jennings, looking round with the air of one who disclaims all responsibility. "I 've been that porely I didn't seem able to take notice of hanythink."

Erin was thereupon forced to rouse herself, and by the time she had identified her bag and collected her other small belongings, the vessel was alongside of the pier, and passengers were already pressing towards the gangway. On shore, there was the usual crowd of people hurrying to and fro, some calling

out to their friends on the steamer. In the midst of the general shouting and laughing, Erin suddenly found herself sobbing. Dear familiar Irish faces and voices! After all, in spite of the pain at her heart, it was sweet to hear them again! Ah, there was Mrs Riley, scarlet in the face—a little fatter and a little greyer than of old, but otherwise unchanged. Catching Erin's eye she waved her umbrella frantically, executing a kind of war-dance of welcome and delight.

"Come on, Jennings; it's all right, you won't fall," cried Erin, infected by the dear old lady's excitement. "I see my friend; make haste."

"*Ceade mille falthe, ceade mille falthe*, my dear," cried Mrs Riley, folding Erin in a large, warm embrace. "Blessings on you for a beauty."

Erin hugged her; it was good to get tangible possession of a bit of the old life.

"How kind of you to come all this way to meet me," she cried.

"And why wouldn't I come to meet you, and you travellin' so far to pay a visit to a stupid old woman like myself. Is that your lady's-maid?" in a somewhat awestruck whisper, as Jennings took up a position beside them, astonished disapproval expressed in every line of her face. "How-do-you-do, miss? I hope you're very well?"

Jennings, who was not feeling particularly robust at that moment, made some inarticulate reply, and laid a genteel and languid hand in the worsted-clad palm heartily extended by Mrs Riley. She was not impressed by that lady's manner and appearance and was beginning to entertain grave doubts as to whether she would be "comfortable" under her roof.

"Sure, it's no distance at all from Sallins," pursued Mrs Riley, turning again to Erin. "It's wonderful the way they have things managed now. We get there in an hour and a half from now—in elegant time for supper. Moll Riddick doesn't know whether she's on her head or her heels, she's so overjoyed at the thought of seeing you. There's only the one thing that has her a bit upset——"

She pinched Erin's arm, with a backward jerk of the head towards Jennings, who was slowly following them to the train.

"She was very much put about at the notion of your bringing *that* lady."

"I had no choice in the matter," sighed Erin.

Indeed, when they reached Sallins Station, she began to fear that Miss Jennings could prove even more of a white elephant than she had anticipated. Mrs Riley's own car was awaiting them, and also a cart with the luggage, in the shafts of which Erin recognised the same shaggy little donkey who had given her so many delightful rides long ago.

"You don't mean to say that's Paddy," she cried; to her it seemed a century since she had mounted him.

"That's Paddy himself," replied Mrs Riley delightedly. "There he is, your own little ass, as much of a rogue as ever. And here's poor old Barney," bestowing a resounding pat or two on the shining flank of the big bay horse in the car. "Barney's a bit of a rogue, too, though he ought to have sense by this time. He's goin' on thirteen—I 've had him this length of time—but, upon my word, he 'd cock up his heels this minute as soon as look at you, and if you go take him any way he isn't used to, he 'll let on to be frightened out of his wits at every heap of stones,

and go prancing and lepping as if he was a three-year-old. But he 'll go as quiet as a lamb now he has his nose towards home. Now, Andy, lend Mick a hand with the boxes—give me the reins here. Stand, Barney, will you."

She climbed upon the car with surprising agility, and the burly, good-humoured farm-labourer, whom Erin remembered of old, obediently handed over the reins, clambered leisurely down from the box, exchanging, while he did so, facetious remarks with the porter, who approached, staggering under the weight of Erin's big trunk.

"Mind how you hoist it up," cried Mrs Riley, anxiously surveying the proceedings. "Whist with your nonsense now, Andy; we must be getting off soon if we want to be there before dark. Mind the bonnet-box—don't be chuckin' it up that way, Mick —you 'll have every one of Miss Erin's feathers destroyed on her!"

"Please to be very careful of the small black box," put in Jennings gloomily. "There doesn't seem to be room enough for it; I hope it won't be dropped on the road!"

"Not at all, miss," replied Andy politely; "it 'll sit here at the bottom elegant. Aisy now, Mick—give the big box a shove, Pat, an' cock up the little feller a bit. There ye are, now! Bedad, we could take a dozen more."

"Here, Andy, hurry up now," called out Mrs Riley. "Are you comfortable there, Erin? you won't have forgotten how to sit on an outside car, as long as it is since you 've had a drive on one. Now, Miss Jennings, will you get up on the other side, if you please, and we 'll be starting."

Jennings looked first at the vehicle and then at the horse, which was evincing sundry signs of impatience; then, coming slowly round to her mistress, coughed deprecatingly behind her hand, and shook her head.

"I couldn't trust myself on such a conveyance," she remarked; "I couldn't reelly. It's what I haven't been used to, and I couldn't risk it. Her ladyship told me I must be prepared to find things a bit different to what I'd been accustomed to, but she never told me I'd be expected to do anything like this. I'd do anything in the world to oblige her ladyship, as I told her, and I'm willing to put up with a great deal, but this is more than anybody could be expected to agree to. I must reelly ask you, miss, to let me have a cab."

"Sure, there isn't a cab to be had nearer than Dublin," cried Mrs Riley, much perturbed. "If I'd known you'd be nervous, I'd have borrowed Father Brophy's covered car. But it'll be dark before we get home at this rate!"

"Sure, there's no fear at all, miss," put in Andy, persuasively. "Ye'll sit as aisy and as qui't as if it was an arm-chair you were in. Sure, poor old Barney 'ull take ye back to Ballinagall as quiet as a lamb. Bedad, he knows better nor to play any thricks with a lady."

"That's so, Andy," chimed in the neighbouring carman. The discussion had aroused much interest, and everyone present was eager to volunteer assistance and advice. "Sure, ye might drive poor ould Barney with a thread," cried one. "Maybe the lady would like to take a seat on the well," suggested another.

"I'll tell ye what yo'll do, Andy," said the porter

impressively, approaching the car, and laying his hand upon the reins. "Drive from the side of the car; and then, if the lady gets anyway nervous, ye can catch a howlt of her."

"She could sit on the box, for the matter o' that," cried Andy. "I 'd as soon drive from the side as from there."

But all these suggestions were received with equal disfavour by Miss Jennings, who, with many shakes of the head and deep sighs, continued to protest that she was sorry to disoblige, but she couldn't—she reelly couldn't.

"I 'd rather walk," she said desperately at length.

"God bless us," ejaculated Mrs Riley, much exasperated, "it 'ud be midnight before ye got to Ballinagall, if ye didn't lose yourself altogether. I 'm sorry you won't get up on the car, miss; but since you can't make up your mind to that, I 'm afraid you 'll have to go in the donkey-cart. You can sit on the little black box, and he 'll take you along very quietly."

This suggestion was unanimously approved of by the bystanders, Andy immediately preparing a seat for Miss Jennings, piling up the boxes so as to afford more room, and placing the cushion from the "well" of the car on the top of her own particular little black trunk. She watched the proceedings dubiously; but, on being assured by several voices that the seat in question was fit for the Queen, that she 'd travel in elegant style, so she would, and that Paddy 'ud have her at Ballinagall before she knew where she was, she finally chose the lesser evil, and clambered laboriously into the vehicle.

"I hope it won't be too great a load for the poor

donkey," remarked Erin, somewhat doubtfully, as ragged Mick, the boy-driver of the donkey-cart, proceeded to screw his small person sideways on to a corner of Erin's box, his legs dangling over the edge.

As if any load could possibly be too heavy for an Irish donkey! The notion was derisively scouted, and Erin was assured that Paddy would "aisy carry as much agin."

Once fairly started, Barney made short work of the distance between the station and Ballinagall. Moll Riddick awaited them on the threshold, receiving Erin in her arms as she descended from the car, and hugging and kissing her with many inarticulate expressions of welcome. By-and-by, holding her at arm's-length, she proceeded to survey her critically.

"She 's the very nose of the Fitzgeralds, hasn't she, ma'am?" appealing to Mrs Riley, who was fluttering round Erin like some large, ponderous hen. "And the turn o' the head—the very same as her poor father—the Lord have mercy on him! Dear, oh dear, poor Father Lalor would be out of his mind with joy this day if he could see her!"

"Sure he does see her," cried Mrs Riley, suddenly becoming a little red about the eyes. "Isn't he looking down at her from heaven this minute?"

"Well, me darlin'," pursued Moll, emphatically pumping Erin's hands up and down, "ye're the real beauty! I don't know how I 'm ever to take me two eyes off of your face. God bless ye! We 've been terrible lonesome without ye all this while. I fretted after ye nearly as much as after his reverence —God rest his holy soul! Well, well, welcome back, alanna! Ye won't be stopping so long away from us

another time." She paused, looked anxiously round, and inquired in a loud whisper, "Where is she? Didn't ye bring her, after all?"

"Who?" inquired Erin, oblivious for the moment of all but her immediate surroundings.

"The pin-sticker," replied Miss Riddick, with a bitter, not to say contemptuous, emphasis on the word. "Her that ye tould the mistress ye were bringing."

"My maid, do you mean? Oh, she's coming, I'm sorry to say. She was afraid to get up on the car, and so she had to go in the donkey-cart."

"Afraid to get up on the car!" ejaculated Moll in scandalised tones. "Well, well, the ignorance o' that. Sure, what sort of a place was she brought up in, at all? I wisht ye'd have left her behind—sure, if there was anything to do for you, couldn't I do it? Me that brought ye up, I may say, and learned ye to sew and all. But there, I've no right to be talkin' that way. Ye're a grand, fashionable young lady now, Miss Erin, dear, and of course I wouldn't know how to be dressin' up your hair in *sheenos*, or anything that way. But, goodness gracious, here am I keeping you standing here, and you famishing for a cup o' tea. Where's the mistress, and what's she thinking about at all? Where are ye, ma'am? Aren't ye going to take Miss Erin up to her room while I wet the tea? I have the loveliest ham, boiled for you, Miss Erin: ye remember how fond ye used to be of a bit of ham? —and there's a chicken roastin'."

Mrs Riley had vanished a few moments before, brandishing a bunch of keys, and now duly appeared; and, after being severely reprimanded by her housekeeper—who exercised the same kindly tyranny over

her as over her deceased master—apologetically informed Erin that she had been getting out a few little things for supper, and now invited her to accompany her upstairs.

There was the same clean, quaint little room, where Erin had once been so happy, and also so miserable. She felt inclined to laugh and cry together as she wandered round it, contemplating the queer china dogs on the chimney-piece, which had once called forth her admiration and wonder, and sniffing at the old-fashioned flowers on the dressing-table, and the bowl full of "Popery" on the window-sill. Then she descended to the parlour—the second best parlour—where Mrs Riley took her meals, and, for the most part, lived, to find the table groaning under the weight of homely good cheer. What a ham! What a honeycomb! What delicious, smoking griddle cakes! There was the chicken, done to a turn, at one end of the table, while Mrs Riley's face beamed behind her big silver teapot at the other.

Moll Riddick came in, ostensibly to wait, in reality to sustain a share of the conversation. After hovering round the table for some little time, recommending Mrs Riley to bestow yet more ample portions of the good fare on Erin than those already piled on her plate, and assuring her mistress that the darlin' child was certainly famishin' altogether, she sat down casually on the edge of a chair close to Erin, from which point of vantage she delivered her opinions with the utmost freedom and enjoyment.

The homely comfort of the place, the simple affection of these kindly people, warmed Erin's heart; she had much to ask, and the responses to her questions

interested and amused her—for there is always a humorous side to Irish life, particularly as set forth by Irish people. She grew animated, even cheerful, and forgot for the time being the pain at her heart.

They had almost finished supper when the sound of wheels without warned them of the arrival of Jennings.

"The creature—she must be dead tired and starving for her tea," cried Mrs Riley compassionately. "Run out, Moll, and see that she has something to eat at once."

Moll disappeared; but returned, after a short time looking irate and aggrieved.

"She is a very grand lady, entirely," she announced. "She is after askin' me if there isn't a housekeeper's room here; and when I tould her the kitchen was the only room I did my housekeepin' in, she says to me, she says"—with an exaggerated imitation of Miss Jennings' supercilious manner—"'I suppose,' says she, 'there's at least a separate table for the upper servants?' 'Ah, God bless us,' says I, 'that's the only table that's in it—I'll put ye a little cloth for yourself at wan end of it, if ye like, an' Sallie an' me 'ull sit very humble and respectful at the other.'"

"P'raps it 'ud be better to ask her to step in here," suggested Mrs Riley in an awestruck whisper.

"Nonsense," cried Erin angrily; "I never heard anything so ridiculous in my life. I knew it was absurd to bring her, but I didn't think she would behave like this. Where is she, I'll speak to her."

But though the interview which ensued resulted in Miss Jennings dissolving in tears, and giving a month's warning on the spot—much to Erin's relief

—Moll Riddick remained ruffled. She came into the parlour presently, under pretext of removing the supper things; but deposited her tray on the side table, and stood contemplating Erin for a moment or two without speaking.

"I suppose ye're used to them kind o' ladies, over beyond," she remarked presently. "Lord and Lady Tweedale lives in splendid style, doesn't they? It's a wonder, ma'am, isn't it"—sarcastically addressing Mrs Riley—"that she could ever make up her mind to be payin' us a visit in this poor little place. I suppose they have ye that way that ye can't do a hand's turn for ye'self now, Miss Erin?"

"You don't think that really, Moll—you know there's nothing of the fine lady about me."

"'Pon me word I don't, then—ye're a good deal altered someway. I wouldn't say it was for the worse, altogether. When I seen ye come steppin' across the room, says I to myself, 'She's fit to be a queen.' Ye'll be gettin' married to some grand English gentleman, and forgettin' all about us."

Erin had risen and laughingly thrown her arms round the old woman's neck; she clasped her still, though at the last words a cloud had overspread her face.

"An' why wouldn't she?" put in Mrs Riley, eagerly taking up the cudgels in her young friend's defence. "Why wouldn't she get married, Moll? Don't be tormentin' her that way. She'll never forget us, no matter what happens. It 'ud be the very best thing she could do, and her all alone in the world."

Erin, with one arm still embracing Moll's neck, turned towards the last speaker.

"You wouldn't like me to marry an Englishman, Mrs Riley, would you?"

"Well, I'd sooner you chose an Irish gentleman, if one come in your way. But, upon my word, I don't know where you are to look for one now. You wouldn't be likely to come across any that would be your equals while ye're stoppin' with me. An' for the matter of that, there's very few to be had now. Sure, what with the bad times, and gettin' no rents, and the huntin' bein' put a stop to, the most of them is broke, or gone out of the country."

Erin, not being disposed to pursue the subject further, devoted herself to pacifying Moll; but by-and-by, in the solitude of her own little room, Mrs Riley's words returned to her, and their significance startled her. It was taken for granted that she belonged to the class which she had hitherto so persistently despised and hated—the landlord class. Fate, indeed, had decreed that she should actually belong to the species; and yet, was she not also the child of a peasant? She did not feel herself out of place in the farmhouse parlour; it did not distress or disturb her to see Mrs Riley putting her knife in her mouth, or blowing into her saucerful of tea. What would Mark Wimbourne have thought had he looked in on the party gathered round that supper table? She could not even conceive his presence among them. Oh, what folly then, what criminal folly, it had been to dream of union with a man cut off from her by every tradition of race and education, as well as by that impassable barrier of warring interests!

And the result of Mrs Riley's innocent words was that Erin lay awake half the night, endeavouring to persuade herself that her recent decision was not only irrevocable but inevitable.

CHAPTER XII

MISCHIEF

AFTER a few days' residence at Ballinagall, Erin, in spite of her efforts to interest herself as of old in the homely life around her, insensibly fell back into that state of apathy which had taken possession of her since her rupture with Mark. Perhaps it could scarcely be termed apathy, for though she felt languid and listless enough, as regarded all that went on around her, she was nevertheless conscious of an inward yearning, vivid and keen, for Mark's presence. The words which he had once laughingly spoken to her, often recurred to her now—"Do you know what it is to be tyrannised over by an idea?" She had scouted the notion then, condemning the weakness which could submit to such tyranny; but she knew better now. She, herself, was pursued and dominated by an idea: the remembrance of Mark Wimbourne, the longing to see his face, to hear his voice. She did her best to conquer herself, to repulse the thought as often as it came; but there was scarcely a moment in the day when it did not come, and at night she dreamt of him. She must do something, she said to herself at last, to rid herself of this incubus—where were her old dreams, her high resolves? Surely work would best exorcise this disturbing spirit, and here she was actually in

Ireland, Ireland for whom she had sworn to labour. She must rouse herself—she must begin to look about her, to find out that work which must lie ready to her hand.

With this determination she petitioned Mrs Riley to accompany her on an expedition to Glenmor. There, on the old spot, amid the familiar surroundings, she would surely find new strength, new energy.

Good-natured Mrs Riley readily agreed, merely expressing the hope that Erin wouldn't go upsetting herself.

"You went through a great deal while you were there, my dear," she continued. "Your uncle was dreadfully hard on you—however, maybe he wasn't accountable, poor gentleman! He knows better now—the Lord have mercy on him! All the people 'ull be delighted to see you, and it 'll be new life to Martha."

When Erin found herself once more within the rickety gate, gazing through the fir-trees at the queer old dilapidated house, it seemed to her as though she had only gone away yesterday. Nothing was changed—for the moment she felt as if she herself were unchanged. Martha came hurrying down the path to meet them, lean and gaunt as ever, less exuberant in her welcome than Mrs Riley and Moll had been, but to the full as much overjoyed. She had prepared luncheon for them in the study, which looked as damp and dreary as ever, though perhaps a little less dusty, since Mr Fitzgerald could no longer anathematise Martha's labours in the cause of cleanliness.

Martha stood gazing at Erin with grim satisfaction during the progress of the meal, preserving a respect-

ful demeanour throughout, however, and speaking only when she was spoken to.

"You know I am coming back to live here, Martha," remarked Erin, "as soon as I am of age. We'll get the old house done up and make it a little brighter, and you shall be my housekeeper."

"Likely, I'm sure," returned Martha, with good-humoured irony. "This would be a nice kind of place for a young lady to bury herself in, and I'm getting too old and too stupid to be any good now."

"Indeed, you're not. You shall have a couple of girls from the village to help you. We'll train them ourselves, and teach them all our little ways. And you'll make me potato cakes for tea, won't you, Martha? Do you remember how I used to love your potato cakes?"

"Ah, I do," replied Martha, her face relaxing. "You was terrible fond of them. I thought o' that. I'm goin' to make ye some for tea this afternoon."

"That is good of you. But really, I am coming back, you know, Martha, as soon as I am twenty-one—only two years and a half more!"

She repeated this assurance many times during the course of the day, and was surprised and wounded at the incredulity with which it was everywhere received.

Mrs Riley was rather tired, and Erin had persuaded her to rest in the house, while she set forth in her progress among her people.

They greeted her for the most part politely, admiringly, but a little coldly; displaying, indeed, a reserve as regarded their own affairs, which not only puzzled and baffled, but hurt her to the heart's core.

"I suppose I am quite a stranger to you now," she remarked to Mrs Hoolahan, who had received her more cordially than the rest; "but I haven't changed a bit. Don't you remember how I used to come and sit here on your little creepy-stool, and nurse the baby? I suppose the baby is a big boy now."

"He is indeed, God bless him!—he is grown a fine little fella—Larry, come here and spake to the lady. Ah, ye oughtn't to be kissin' him that way, miss. Look at his dirty face. He's a rogue entirely, miss—he'll whip off down the road as soon as me back's turned, and go playing in the ditch with the other boys. I buried two since, miss," she added in a lower tone.

"Oh, did you, Mrs Hoolahan? I didn't know. Nobody ever told me. I am so sorry!"

"You were so far away, miss, ye see," returned the woman; "it wasn't to be expected you could be thinkin' of us, and you all that way off. Ah, indeed, Tim and meself has put in a terrible time this two year. We were a bit behind every way, ye know, and Tim is afeared of his life he'll be gettin' notice to quit before long. Maybe ye'ud think well o' lowerin' the rent a thrifle, miss, and lettin' us off the March gale?"

Her face was wistful and eager: one or two of the elder children drew near to listen, open-mouthed.

"What can I do?" returned Erin, almost with tears in her voice. "I have written several times to the agent about things like this, but he does not pay any attention to what I say!"

The hope died out on Mrs Hoolahan's face, and she looked at Erin for a moment without speaking;

then she called to the children to come away out of that, and not be botherin' the lady.

"I 'm sure, miss," she added, turning to Erin, "it 's too good you are to be noticin' them at all. I ax your pardon for makin' free the way I done, but when ye began talkin' of ould times, I thought I 'd just mention it. Tim was thinkin', ye know, when he h'ard ye was the landlord, that we 'd maybe be let off a bit aisier now—he was romancin' that way, ye know. Says he, 'Miss Erin 's no grab-all,' says he—savin' yer presence. That 's the very word he said."

"Mrs Hoolahan," said Erin earnestly, "I assure you I am not allowed to manage anything now, or to interfere in any way. I am treated just like a child. But it won't always be so. When I am twenty-one I shall be my own mistress, and then I shall do what I like, and you will all find things very different. We must be patient for a little while—it won't be long now, only two years and a few months."

"Two years!" repeated Mrs Hoolahan drearily. "God bless us, sure Tim an' me 'll be out of it long before that."

What could Erin do? It was in vain to protest and promise: none of her former cronies believed her. Even when she emptied her purse among them, and actually went so far as to promise to supply certain tenants under notice to quit with the necessary funds for paying the arrears of rent due, the result was not so satisfactory as she had hoped. After all, it was only taking money out of one pocket to put it into another. The people were quite astute enough to realise the fact, though they could not be expected to understand the peculiarity of her position. They were, therefore, only moderately grateful.

"I 'm thinkin', Miss Erin, ye 're wan of the rale ould stock," cried one old man, "the very moral o' your grandfather, ye are. Sure, I remember him well. He 'd give ye the coat off his back if he saw ye in trouble. The sayin' went, that if ye could get next or nigh the master he 'd deny ye nothin'! But sure there wasn't many of us that got the chanst—he was a grand sportsman entirely, and he 'd be off drivin' his coach here and there, and entertainin' his friends all over the counthry, and that 's the way the most of the money went. The land was sold over our heads —in the end. Ay, he was a good gentleman, a fine man—the Lord have mercy on him !—but his agent was a cruel man. He had us rack-rented altogether."

"My grandfather ought to have seen that his tenants were properly treated," cried Erin hotly. "He ought to have looked after his affairs himself. I don't want you to think me like him," she added, almost petulantly.

The bystanders, with characteristic regard for courtesy and good manners, refrained from smiling and glancing at each other. A few of them hastened to assure her that "Ould Dinny Kinsella wasn't meanin' that—of coorse not. Sure, them ould ancient times was gone. Miss Erin had no call to be thinkin' them things."

"I know," pursued Erin hotly, "that because I live in England, and have to let an agent collect the rents, you think I don't care about you any more. You think I am just going to take your money and amuse myself, and forget all about you."

It was exactly what they did think, but their disclaimers were prompt and fervent.

"How can I make you believe," she cried, looking

imploringly round, "that I—I would rather die than treat you like that? I am coming back, as soon as ever I can, to be among you. I will live at Glenmor, and look after everything myself. All the rents shall be lowered, and all the arrears wiped out; and I 'll repair your houses, and build you stables and barns——"

"Sure, that 'll be grand," remarked somebody, with a feeble attempt at enthusiasm. "Bedad, we won't know ourselves," cried another. All were anxious to humour her, being genuinely touched by her distress; but, as has been said, it was only too evident to Erin that no one gave credence to her promises.

"An' when will ye be coming, miss?" inquired someone, presently.

"When I am of age," replied Erin, proceeding to explain, for the twentieth time, how very soon that would be. "Only a little more than two years."

Two years! How many of that little crowd would still be there in two years—how much might happen in two years! In two years, above all, Erin would have ample time to forget her pledges.

"Well, God bless you for the word, miss," one man said, with a somewhat rueful smile. "Sure, if ye don't do anything else, ye say somethin' pleasant to us anyway."

Erin choked down a sob as she walked away from them. What a miserable fate was hers — what a horrible disparity between her purposes and her circumstances. They did not believe her—her friends, her people, doubted her sincerity. Well, appearances certainly were against her. But it was hard to feel oneself an anomaly. She made her way, half blinded by tears, to the Nolans' ruined house. All these

years it had lain under a ban. It had crumbled into still greater decay since Erin had last looked upon it. The bare rafters had mouldered and grown rotten; the little windows were choked with cobwebs; the garden, which had once been Mary's pride, was now a mere tangle of weeds.

Erin leaned her arms on the broken gate and gazed at the desolate premises. Some day—some day, when the reins of power were at length in her hands—what a transformation would she not work here! She would rebuild the house and restore the garden, and Mary, dear Mary, should come back. Pat should have work to do—Erin would make him so happy and contented that he would have no temptation to discuss grievances at the public-house. With the Nolans' return, Erin's reign should commence. This return had been long planned and cherished — she had even spoken of it to Mary in her letters; and Mary had thanked and blessed her with affectionate warmth, and said that God knew she would be glad to be back in the dear little place, but just at the present time she saw no prospect of it. Pat seemed to have settled down where he was, and was doing very well, thanks be to God! and there was some talk of Bridget getting married. And Patsy was after getting a grand place, with a prospect of being taken into the business. But, please God, before she died, Mary would see her darling Miss Erin again. This was a little ambiguous — a little disheartening; but she would not suffer herself to be wholly discouraged. Mary would come when the house was built and ready to receive her and her family; Bridget and her husband could come, too, if that was all. Erin would find them work to do

and a home to live in—as for Pat, junior, she was rich enough to bear the expenses of an occasional visit to his parents. As Erin looked about her, however, these dreams of better times to come gave place to the sinister remembrance of the tragedy which had been enacted here in the past. This tenantless house, which no one had hitherto sought to repair, because any fresh inmate would consider himself accursed in taking the place of its former owners, was it not a grim and melancholy protest against the existing condition of things? On that moss-grown doorstep Erin had crouched, with her childish heart bursting within her, her whole soul aflame with indignation. What vows had she not there registered. What resolutions had she not formed! Impotent, indeed, had she been in those days, and impotent was she still. Her nearest and dearest looked upon her with dubious eyes—so far, she had done nothing to prove that the pledges of those early times were not idle. They would shortly be redeemed; but, meanwhile, how should she endure the doubts and disappointment of the people whom she had sworn to assist and protect? There must be work that she could undertake even now; there must be some corner of this troubled land which would afford scope to her sympathies and energies.

She made her way back to Glenmor slowly, and was very silent and thoughtful during tea. During their homeward journey in the train she studied the evening paper carefully, and her eye was caught by an announcement in large type:—

"Impending wholesale evictions in the North-west."

Holding the paper close to her eyes in the fading light, she read an account, couched in fiery terms, of

the troubles of the population of a certain barren, mountainous district, the name of which was duly given. For many years, it seemed, a continuous struggle had been going on between the people and their landlord. Aggression, said the paper, had been followed by reprisal; rapacity had stirred up revolt. Of late, the relations had become more and more strained; certain renegades had been boycotted, and an obnoxious bailiff severely beaten. The landlord had announced his determination of putting an end to this state of things. At an early date, those whom he had looked upon as ringleaders were to be evicted; and if quiet were not soon restored, he threatened to replace the malcontents by a new population more to his mind. The journal in which these facts were recorded, doubted, however, whether the landlord would find this plan altogether profitable. There might be some difficulty in beguiling a new body of tenantry into that inaccessible, God-forsaken spot; and the fate of the last inhabitants would not be likely to encourage others. But if it did not gratify his greed, he could, at least, glut his appetite for cruelty. More than a thousand souls would, in consequence of this act of savage vengeance, find themselves homeless; aged and sickly folk, young children, men and women still in their prime, would be driven forth—some to die, others to seek in vain some outlet for their energies. Could it be wondered, the writer added, that these energies — the energies of desperate men — should sometimes be forced into channels deplorable for themselves, and dangerous to the community at large? That the projected work of devastation would be carried out in its entirety, no one could doubt. The evictions already decided on would, of necessity, be

followed by many others. These drastic measures were not likely to restore peace and order among a people already irritated beyond endurance. How could these hapless sufferers be expected to remain quiet in their misery? As well unmercifully thrash a horse and expect it to stand still. If a few regrettable acts of violence had indeed been committed, surely it was unjust to hold a whole district responsible. It was from the seed of injustice that crops of outrages sprang forth.

Erin crumpled up the paper in her hand; her heart was beating, and her eyes flashing. More than a thousand souls! Once happy in their little homes, their simple employments; now doomed to be outcasts, houseless wanderers over the barren hillside! More than a thousand souls! Why did they not make a stand? Why, instead of the wild and horrible deeds by which they gave vent to their desperation, did they not oppose a calm and resolute opposition to those who would drive them from their homes? Here and there over the country there had been, indeed, already feeble attempts at resistance. The inhabitants of a few thatched cottages—a dozen or so, perhaps, at a time—had endeavoured to barricade their wretched dwellings, and had been driven out like vermin. This time the destruction was to be worked on a large scale, and the resistance should be in proportion. If a thousand people maintained, simultaneously, a brave front, if they showed a steady determination to cleave to hearth and home while life remained, to fight for hearth and home, if need be, their antagonists would, at least, be overawed.

Not for nothing was Erin the daughter of the man who had marshalled a company in '48, and of the

peasant girl whose ancestors had revelled in many a faction fight. She was excited and overwrought; all her old feelings of wrath and indignation roused afresh by her visit to Glenmor; moreover, the impetuous desire to do something in the service of the cause she had at heart, to prove herself ready and willing to maintain the principles she had so constantly avowed, at all cost and hazard to herself, made her resolve on taking a decided step. Before she slept that night, she had written an impassioned appeal, directed particularly to the inhabitants of the doomed district, and generally to Irishmen at large, calling upon them to be true to themselves, and true to the traditions of their forefathers; advocating in veiled, but unmistakable terms, a resolute opposition to injustice and tyranny, and recounting the victories won for the people, even in recent times, by a show of force and determination.

"The thousand victims of oppression at ———," she wrote, "have thousands more at their backs, and these, in turn, have sympathisers too numerous to be counted. Countrymen, do you realise what strength is there, what power is there? With courage, with boldness, with steady resistance, we may teach a lesson to all would-be tyrants; the peasants of ——— may indeed be held up as an example to the nation, but in a manner different to that intended by their persecutors."

She enclosed this document in a letter to the editor of the paper which contained an announcement of the impending evictions, begging him to insert it, and giving him her full name and address.

Little did innocent Mick, as he jogged cheerfully to "town" next morning, astride on Paddy's back—

or rather, perched on Paddy's hindquarters, in the closest proximity to his tail—think what a dangerous missive was that which Erin had entrusted him to post for her. As well, indeed, might he have carried a bomb in the battered leather bag, which apparently flapped so aimlessly over his shoulder!

Erin did not expect an answer, but in due time an answer came. Her appeal had apparently duly appeared in the pages of the journal to which she had addressed it; for this letter, sent on by the editor, came from one of the villages marked out for depopulation. The writer was evidently illiterate, but the sentiments he set forth warmed and rejoiced Erin's heart. He expressed his gratitude for her advice and sympathy, and wished there were more like her in Ireland, which would not then be so unfortunate. "Dear Sir," the writer added—he had addressed Erin throughout as "Dear Sir," a fact which caused her unmixed satisfaction—"if you could come to this place and see for yourself the way we are, you wouldn't believe it. But the people hereabouts doesn't know what they'd best do — their mostly very quite, but some of them is near druv wild. It would break your heart to see the way they do be going on. If you could come here, I could tell you a great many things, and it would be worth yer while."

Here was a chance for Erin! Here was work—heaven-sent, no doubt—for those weary, idle hands of hers! The appeal should have an immediate response — how could she disregard it? It was quite true the writer took her to be a man, the boldness of her sentiments had caused this natural mistake—but what of that? Women had, before

now, taken their share in national affairs in Ireland; it might be that on this occasion a woman's intuition and nimbleness of wit would be of especial value. She would go up to the stricken hillside—there she would be able at least to do some good, even if no decisive step were taken under her auspices.

Mrs Riley was much astonished when Erin announced her intention of undertaking a journey to the North.

"Why, what in the name of goodness do you want to do up there?" she cried, raising her eyes and hands in amazement.

"They are all in trouble up there. That's why I want to go. I want to see what goes on, and to help the poor people."

"Sure, ye can send them tea and flannel petticoats —the creatures!—from here. Goodness knows what a sort of a place it is at all. Up in the—hills, d'ye say? They're the dreariest, black, stony hills ever you saw. I don't like the notion at all. And goodness knows what sort of a place we'll find to stop in! Ah, child o' grace, stay quiet here with me—sure, we are just about beginning cutting our corn—the boys 'ull be up to their tricks, and no mistake, if I'm not in it to look after them!"

"Oh, Mrs Riley, I didn't expect you to come," stammered Erin. "I know you are busy."

"And who did you expect to go with you, then? The pin-sticker, as Moll calls her? Upon me word she'd be very useful up there."

"No, I certainly shan't take her—I'll send her home, I think. I'll explain to Lady Tweedale—I thought, perhaps, I might go alone."

The step on which Erin was bent was so bold, its

consequences would be, in all probability, so weighty, that she felt herself in a manner absolved from the necessity of guardianship. She was about to cut herself free from all trammels; she was about, for once, to act entirely on her own responsibility, to follow the line of conduct which seemed to her best; the mere planning of her course of action made her feel already independent.

But Mrs Riley, not being taken into Erin's confidence, naturally did not see things in the same light. Her ruddy face turned ruddier than ever, and putting on her spectacles, she looked steadily and indignantly at the girl.

"Go alone! What in the wide world are you thinking of? If you are tired of the old woman, say so. You can go back to your grand friends in England, of course, if you want to—and, indeed, there 's not much to amuse you here, my poor child. But while you are in Ireland, Erin, my dear, you 'll have to put up with me. Where you go, I go—crops or no crops!" added Mrs Riley firmly. "I wonder what my poor brother would have said to the notion of your travelling the country by yourself!"

Erin made her peace with her kind old friend with many embraces and apologies. No course remained to her but either to welcome her companionship, or to relinquish the expedition: the last was not to be thought of. So, as soon as the needful preparations could be made, Erin and her puzzled and reluctant cicerone started northwards, and Miss Jennings, shaking the dust of Ballinagall from her feet, set forth on her return journey to her native land.

CHAPTER XIII

A RESCUING PARTY

"I HAVE just had the most extraordinary letter from Erin," remarked Lady Tweedale. "She writes from some place with an utterly unpronounceable name—it begins with a 'K'—and ends with 'ogue,' but I really can't make out the rest. She says she has sent away poor Jennings—which I think isn't at all nice of her. No, Joan, it really isn't. The only request I did make of Erin was that she would take a person with her whom I knew something about, and on whom I could rely."

"Well, you know, mamma, Erin told us last week that Jennings gave notice directly she got to Ballinagall."

"I don't wonder at it," resumed Lady Tweedale. "Erin herself says it is only a farmhouse, and I don't see how Jennings could be expected to like living in a farmhouse. But just listen, Edward—she writes in the oddest way:—'You 'll be surprised to hear that I have left Ballinagall for a time, and am now staying at a place called—well, the word with the unpronounceable name. I came here because I heard of the distress and misery of the place, and thought perhaps I might help the poor people in their trouble.'"

"She is a good little thing, I must say that," cried Sir Edward, looking up from his bacon and eggs. "She is good-natured if she isn't very wise."

Joan glanced at her father with quick gratitude for this unexpected tribute, but Lady Tweedale retained her expression of severe disapproval. "She certainly does not appear to be acting very wisely at present," she remarked. "I only hope she won't do anything outrageously foolish. Just listen: — 'The whole population of this place expect to be evicted. I now see for myself things which I only knew by hearsay before; I have witnessed the results of a long system of injustice and rapacity. The ancestors of some of these people have not only built with their own hands the miserable dwellings which they are now called upon to give up, but carried from the valley below the very soil in which they grow their potatoes. It has been the labour of years, as you may think, to carry—for the most part in creels on their backs—load after load of earth up this stony hillside. What was formerly a waste is now under cultivation, entirely through the patient toil of the poor creatures whose descendants are to be driven away like a flock of sheep, to seek shelter where they may, amid these barren mountains!'"

Sir Edward laid down his knife and fork.

"I don't believe a word of it," he remarked; "they've been cramming her—telling her a pack of lies."

Lady Tweedale laughed a little. "She says she is quite sure that none of us will believe in this story, yet that it is absolutely true. Now listen, this is what makes me feel fidgety,—'Mrs Riley is with me here, so that I am well taken care of; but when I see the tragedies enacted around me, I feel impatient of being pampered and shielded from everything rough and disagreeable. These sufferers are my fellow-countrymen, my own flesh and blood. When I am

among them thus, I realise that I, too, am a child of the soil, a daughter of the people. I don't feel as if I could ever settle down contentedly to a life of mere fine-ladyism. Dear friend, you have been wonderfully good to me, and I know I must seem to have ill repaid your kindness. I know you will disapprove of what I am doing now, but I do not want to appear underhand. All my sympathies are with the people. I feel just at present all kind of instincts asserting themselves within me. Do not be more angry than you can help, if you hear of my saying and doing things which seem to you unfeminine!'"

"Hullo," cried Sir Edward, "what is she up to, d'ye suppose? I think I'll just write and tell her to come back at once. I'm her guardian, after all—responsible to the Lord what's-his-name. I shall be getting into hot water myself if we don't look out. Look here, Adela, you'd better write to her," pursued Sir Edward, who never did anything for himself that he could get other people to do for him. "You write to her and tell her to come back at once, and write to that Riley woman too—tell her she ought to have looked after Erin better."

"Did she write to you, Joan?" inquired Lady Tweedale.

"Yes," returned the girl, who looked quite pale and agitated, "she wrote very much in the same vein as in her letter to you. I'll write to her, too—I'll beg her to come back—I think perhaps she will when I ask her."

"Well, it is really very awkward, you know," returned her mother a little irritably. "Dear Mark will have to come down next week — and then there'll be the elections to think about soon. Oh, these

Radicals," groaned Lady Tweedale, "how they do complicate life, to be sure!"

"Never mind whether she likes it or not," growled Sir Edward. "She'll have to submit. Really, you know, Adela, it's very serious. Why the dickens couldn't she marry Mark when he asked her? He'd have managed her—he'd have got all that nonsense out of her head."

"It won't be very pleasant for him, poor fellow, to find her here!" observed Lady Tweedale in melancholy tones. "It's really very tiresome. But I suppose the poor, dear child can't help being odd and erratic," she added, relenting. "We must try and get her back; it would never do for her to be mixed up in the disturbances over there."

Later in the same day Lady Tweedale was still more agitated by a visit from Jennings, who was staying with a sister in the neighbourhood, while awaiting a new situation, and who considered it her duty to offer a personal explanation to her ladyship as to her reasons for leaving Miss Fitzgerald's service.

"From the very first moment we got to Ballinagall, my lady, I felt sure that I should never be able to stay. It wasn't so much the people or the place that was different to what I'd been used to—which, of course, they was; but still, since your ladyship was so kind as to explain to me that I must be prepared to find them so, I shouldn't have minded—but Miss Fitzgerald herself—" Here Jennings coughed discreetly behind her hand, "Well, I wouldn't wish to complain of any friend of your ladyship's, but still, Miss Fitzgerald's ways was"—here Jennings paused and coughed again—"reelly most sing'lar. When I see her shaking hands with the common lab'rin' man

who drove the outside car, and pattin' the dirty little donkey-boy on the back, I said to myself, 'I'm quite sure,' I said, 'her ladyship can't be aware of these doings, for she wouldn't approve of them.' Reelly, I scarcely like to mention it to your ladyship, but Miss Fitzgerald used acshally to kiss the cook at the farm-house; and she 'd make that free with every common man and woman about the place—talkin' with them and jokin' with them, and nursing the dirty babies —that I was quite ashamed."

"All these poor people were probably old friends of Miss Fitzgerald's," returned Lady Tweedale, with her most stately air. She did not like to repress Jennings too much, for it occurred to her that she might possibly be able to throw some light on Erin's proceedings; but, nevertheless, she did not approve of the tone of these criticisms. "You must remember that we all think a great deal of our old friends, whatever may be their rank of life. Sir Edward and I are very fond of chatting with our people in the village, and Miss Tweedale frequently nurses the babies —frequently," repeated Lady Tweedale impressively.

"Oh, certingly, your ladyship; but if I might make so bold as to say so, the village here and the people is very different. Indeed, I have many a time gone to see them myself, and nobody would mind holding one of their babies. Nice, clean, little things, and also respectable, my lady. But I never saw such queer things in my life as in Ireland, my lady; and Miss Fitzgerald herself was so different to any lady I ever lived with. So short in her temper, my lady —and so excited-like. Sometimes she 'd sit up half the night writin' to the newspapers."

"Writing to the newspapers!" repeated Lady

Tweedale, genuinely startled. "Are you sure, Jennings? What could she have been writing to the papers about?"

"I reelly don't know, my lady; I used to sit up sometimes till midnight waiting for her bell. She used to forget all about telling me to go to bed, and then be quite vexed because I hadn't gone; and at last, I used to venture to knock at her door, and there she'd be, writin', writin' on great big sheets of paper! I saw the letters directed to Irish papers, my lady. And she'd get letters back from them again—I used to see the names on the envelopes. I found one paper in her room marked, I brought it for your ladyship to see. I thought you might perhaps blame me, my lady, for giving notice, as you'd been so kind as to arrange everything with me and to explain that I must be prepared to put up with a good deal. I'd have stayed if it had been possible, my lady; but I couldn't make myself 'appy."

"Very well, Jennings, perhaps it was a little difficult," returned Lady Tweedale distantly. "You can give me the paper; I daresay it is nothing of any importance. Miss Fitzgerald takes great interest in Irish politics, and has probably written to make inquiries on some subject which appeared to her of importance. There is nothing in the least extraordinary about that. However, I will glance over the paper. Good-bye, Jennings, go to the housekeeper's room before you leave and have some tea, won't you?" she continued, walking away with the paper.

In the privacy of her own sitting-room she anxiously sought out and read the marked column; Miss Jennings, in her fear of her patroness's displeasure, had, as may have been noted, exaggerated

matters a good deal. She had represented Erin as being in the habit of corresponding constantly with Irish journals, whereas she had only sent one document, and had received only one reply. Jennings had been debarred from seeking her maiden slumbers at the customary time on one solitary occasion. But, by an unlucky chance, it was the very paper containing Erin's compromising appeal of which she had possessed herself, and used to substantiate her charges. Lady Tweedale's eyes grew wide behind her gold-rimmed pince-nez as she read the sentiments therein set forth: and the oftener she perused them, the more convinced she became that they had been penned by no other hand than Erin's. The writer talked to begin with, in the opening paragraph, of having returned to Ireland after an absence of several years, and proceeded to describe impressions as to the changes which had there taken place, in almost the same words as those employed by Erin in her earlier letters from Ballinagall. Then Erin's style was distinctive—unmistakable. There could be no doubt that she was the author of this exceedingly reckless and incendiary article. One can imagine the dismay and displeasure of the Tweedales at this discovery; even Joan was constrained to admit that Erin ought not to have done it. Everybody wrote to Erin, even Sir Edward sent her a missive of six lines, expressing his surprise and displeasure, and ordering her to come home at once.

Some few days elapsed before her reply came, and then it was most unsatisfactory. Erin wrote in the same excited strain as that which had characterised her last letter, but announced most positively her intention of remaining where she was.

Mark had meanwhile arrived on the scene, and had been acquainted with the state of affairs. He was present when Erin's letter was read out, but made no comment, sitting drumming on the table, in apparent absence of mind, while the others exclaimed and lamented.

"Here is another letter, I see, from that awful place," cried Lady Tweedale, suddenly discovering it amid the pile yet unopened by her plate. "It must be from Mrs Riley—let us see what she has to say."

Mrs Riley wrote dismally and urgently. She was quite prepared to be blamed for the turn affairs were taking. It was not to be expected that Sir Edward and Lady Tweedale could think anything but that she had had a hand in them. But what could she do? Erin would have gone by herself if she had not accompanied her. She was now getting beyond Mrs Riley altogether, and that lady was afraid of her life she would be getting herself into serious trouble. She spent her day tearing about the hills, and speechifying to the poor distracted creatures who were about to be turned out. She would not listen to Mrs Riley at all, and the latter was afraid that if she wasn't taken away before the evictions took place, something dreadful would happen. Only a few days remained now—would not somebody come at once and fetch her? That would be the only chance. Mrs Riley proceeded to give exact particulars of their whereabouts. It had been impossible to find accommodation in the village, which was to be the chief scene of events, and they were staying at a small farmhouse about a mile and a half away.

The party round the Fletewood breakfast-table glanced at each other in blank dismay.

"You'll have to go at once, my dear," said Lady Tweedale at length.

Now, Sir Edward was at all times exceedingly difficult to get under weigh. His sturdy form and abrupt determined manner conveyed the impression of great decision of character, but he was in reality one of the most helpless of men. He hated to be obliged to act on his own responsibility, or to be hurried into any important step—while the mere idea of taking a journey by himself, into an unknown region, appeared too utterly preposterous.

"Go where?—what for?—what are you talking about?" he growled, growing very red. "I'll do nothing of the kind. She is a naughty, obstinate little girl, and if she won't come back when I tell her, she may stay where she is."

"Well, really, Edward, I don't see that I can be expected to travel off to the wilds of, of—wherever it is, and I suppose it will come to that," responded Lady Tweedale plaintively. "You know I never can undertake long journeys in a hurry—I always like to travel by easy stages. But something must be done at once. You don't want the child taken up, I suppose, and put in prison?"

"Nonsense, who'd imprison a monkey like that?—You are not going, Adela, and you needn't think it. I shan't allow you to undertake such a journey, it would knock you up completely; probably you would have to travel a good deal of the time on an outside car. That wouldn't quite suit you, I think. Send what's-her-name—your maid—White, if you must send anybody."

"Oh mamma, let me go," pleaded Joan, who had been for some little time choking down her tears in

the background. "Do let me go—perhaps Erin would listen to me! I do think I am the person she loves best in the world."

"I think I will go," said Mark, suddenly looking up. "Let Joan come too—I could not very well bring Miss Fitzgerald back alone with me, I suppose. Let Joan come. I will take care of her."

"My dear Mark!" cried his aunt in amazement, "are you serious? Don't you think it will be a little —awkward?"

"I think it will be exceedingly awkward for everybody if something isn't done at once. You know, Uncle Edward, a great deal of responsibility attaches to the custody of a ward in Chancery. You'll find yourself in trouble if there is any catastrophe over there."

"Why, what can I do?" cried Sir Edward. "The little minx won't mind what I say."

"It will be said that you should not have let her out of your sight. However, do not let us waste time in talking. We must be off at once. We are too late for the mail, of course, but we can go by the Holyhead — Dublin line. Get to Dublin to-night, start by the first train to-morrow morning. I suppose we shall find out all further particulars there. Can you be ready, Joan?"

"Really, Mark, I'm not sure that I shall let Joan go—I don't half like the notion of her being in this wild place where there are all sorts of disturbances going on—something might happen to her."

"I will be answerable for her. She shall not go near the disturbances. I think that Joan and I together might possibly do some good."

"Yes, yes, let her go, mamma; let her go," put in

Sir Edward, much relieved at finding he was not expected to go himself. "Mark will take care of her, won't you, Mark? Mark is as steady as a rock."

"I don't half like it," persisted Lady Tweedale, "but I suppose we can't do anything else. Take plenty of wraps, Joan, and you'd better have a basket of provisions. Telegraph to me every day, won't you, and come back as soon as ever you can. I suppose it is better for me not to write to Mrs Riley. You will get there almost before a letter could reach—and, in any case, I fancy you will have a better chance if you take Erin by surprise."

Mark and Joan agreed to this, and everyone hurried away to make their various preparations. The journey planned in such haste proved more tedious and difficult than they had anticipated. Part of it had to be accomplished on the long cars which take the place of railways in certain districts; and by one of those untoward accidents which sometimes beset the path of travellers most desirous of speed, one of these cars broke down on the road, and Mark and Joan reached the next stage of their journey too late to catch the corresponding train.

It was not, therefore, until two days after they had set forth from Fletewood that they arrived at their destination. They were obliged to drive the last ten miles of their journey on an ordinary car; Mark endeavoured to obtain information from the driver as to the anticipated events, but found him either ignorant or taciturn. He pointed out with his whip, indeed, a spot high up among the hills, remarking that the district in question was "over beyant," but

was either unwilling or unable to enlighten the travellers further.

After some difficulty they succeeded in identifying the house where Mrs Riley and Erin were lodging. It was a small farmhouse, occupying a rather solitary position at the foot of a bare, bleak, brown hill, and both the travellers were at once struck by its deserted look.

After knocking for a considerable time, the door was partly opened, and a pale, anxious-eyed woman peered at them from behind the crevice. She gazed with blank amazement first at the travellers and then at the car, and at the little pile of luggage heaped in the centre.

"Is there a lady called Mrs Riley staying here?" inquired Mark; he deemed it better not to ask for Erin.

The woman hesitated, and then replied that there was.

"Will you kindly tell her that the friends she expected have come to see her?" said Mark. He turned to assist Joan to alight, and desired the car-driver to put up his horse for a few hours, as he would want him again in the afternoon.

"If only we could persuade her to come away at once," he murmured to Joan, as they followed their dubious and unwilling guide into a small parlour at the back of the house. There they found Mrs Riley sitting alone. Erin was nowhere to be seen.

Mrs Riley stared at them blankly for a moment, and then clapped her hands.

"Sir Edward Tweedale," she cried; "is it Sir Edward Tweedale? Have you come from England?"

"Yes, yes," cried Joan eagerly. "My father and mother couldn't come, and so they have sent us. I am Joan Tweedale, and this is my cousin Mr Wimbourne. We are come to fetch Erin—oh, where is Erin?"

"God be praised!" ejaculated Mrs Riley. "I've been praying night and day for this; but you very nearly came too late. Sure, the evictions are to take place this very day. I was at my wit's end about Erin. The poor child, there was no holding her. But what d' ye think? I have her locked up."

"Locked up?" cried Mark and Joan together, too much disturbed and excited to smile.

"Yes, indeed!" triumphantly producing a large rusty door-key. "By the greatest good luck her room opens out of mine, so she can't persuade anybody else to let her out. When she went up to put on her hat this morning, I just slipped up after her and turned the key in the lock, and I locked my own door, too, so she is safe. Sure, it's the only thing I could do. There was no gettin' any good of her. 'Pon me word, ye'd think she was out of her mind these days! She called out to me when she heard me, beggin' me for God's sake to let her out at once; but, says I—'No, my darlin' child, I'll have to keep you safe for your own good.' And I came away because I couldn't bear to hear her beggin' and prayin' me."

"You are a clever woman," cried Mark, shaking her hand cordially. "If you had not had your wits about you there might have been a dreadful misfortune."

"Thank you, sir," returned Mrs Riley. "I'm sure half the time I didn't know whether I had any wits at all, or whether I was in them or out of them, but

I'm glad you think I managed for the best. Will you step upstairs now, miss, and we'll let out our darling prisoner, and you must try and persuade her to have sense. I'm afraid it'll be long enough before she'll forgive me for this piece of work. We'll bring her down with us in a minute or two, sir; will ye sit down while ye're waiting?"

She left the room with Joan, and Mark patiently waited; but though hurried footsteps were audible in the room overhead, he heard no cry of recognition. By-and-by Joan's voice sounded from the top of the stairs.

"Mark, Mark, come here quickly."

He bounded up, three steps at a time. In the first small scantily furnished bedroom Mrs Riley and Joan were standing gazing at each other with white terrified faces. The inner room was empty!

CHAPTER XIV

THE IRISH JOAN OF ARC

AFTER a pause of astonishment and dismay, Mark walked to the window: the explanation of Erin's disappearance was simple enough. The sill was only about twelve feet from the ground, and the gnarled branches of a pear-tree afforded an easy means of descent. Mrs Riley had not taken these facts into her calculations.

"There is no difficulty in explaining how she got away," said Mark rather drily; "but the problem of how to get hold of her is more difficult. You say these evictions are to take place to-day," he pursued, turning to Mrs Riley. "Are you quite sure? We met hardly anyone on the road coming here, and everything seems quiet enough."

"It's to-day they're to come off, sure enough," groaned poor Mrs Riley; "and you wouldn't be likely to meet anyone concerned in them. The place is two miles away from here, and the sheriff and police and all will be coming from ——, near eight miles off on the other side."

"Then Erin may be in the very thick of the affair now," cried Mark. "There's not a moment to be lost. Joan; you must stay quietly here with Mrs Riley, and I will take the car and drive as fast as I can to this place. Tell me the name again, Mrs Riley."

"I'll come down and explain to the carman where

it is, and the nearest way of getting at it," returned Mrs Riley. "Bless us and save us, this is a terrible day! To think of her giving me the slip like that!"

In a few minutes Mark had hunted up the driver of his car—induced him by a substantial bribe to harness the horse with all possible speed, and started off on his quest, leaving Mrs Riley wringing her hands on the doorstep. One or two heads peered at the retreating vehicle from behind the angle of the house, and the woman who had admitted Mark and his cousin stood in the road watching it with a curious expression. When it had disappeared, she turned to Mrs Riley, "It's to be hoped he manes well by the darlin' young lady," she said.

"Means well? Why wouldn't he mean well? Isn't he her own first cousin or the next thing to it?" retorted that lady, whose ideas were considerably scattered by the occurrences of the morning.

Meanwhile Mark, feverishly impatient, was urging the driver to yet greater speed. If the man had been taciturn before, he was now absolutely mute, except for an occasional interjection to his horse. He sat, looking frowningly at the road before him, every now and then turning his head as though to listen.

The sombre grandeur of the gorge in which they soon found themselves impressed Mark strangely. The heather was now in full bloom, and though wonderful purple lights caught it here and there, the general effect was gloomy. Huge boulders of rock appeared to have been scattered freely by some giant hand over the precipitous sides of these dark mountains. The only living things about them were the little streams which ran babbling over their stony beds at frequent intervals.

They had proceeded about a mile and a half, when the driver suddenly checked his horse and threw up his hand.

"What's that?" he whispered, speaking to Mark for the first time, and looking round at him with a blanched and terrified face.

It was the rattle of firearms. The hills caught up the sound, and it echoed from side to side with sinister effect.

"They're at it," cried the driver, still staring at Mark.

"What! are they resisting the police?" inquired Mark, anxiously.

The man shook his head, and jerked his thumb forward with an expressive gesture.

"Them's not our boys," he cried. "Didn't ye hear they was shootin' altogether — them's the soldiers." He proceeded to relieve his mind by a few choice qualifying epithets.

Mark, in his alarm and excitement, seized him by the arm, and actually shook it.

"Drive on, man!" he cried. "Drive on for God's sake."

"I won't, then," he retorted sullenly. "D'ye want me and the poor beast to get shot, and me licence took away. I'll not stir a step farther. Go yourself, if ye're that sot on it; but don't be tryin' to get an honest man into trouble."

"Well, stay here until I come back, then," returned Mark angrily. "I can't waste time in arguing with you. But mind you do stay here," he added, turning with a threatening gesture.

The man acquiesced sulkily, and Mark set off at the utmost speed of which his long legs were

capable. A half-mile "Irish" of a stony mountain path takes a certain amount of time to cover, and to Mark's anxious and impatient mind it seemed interminable. He climbed one stony incline, it seemed to him, after another, without drawing perceptibly nearer to his destination, though, as he advanced, certain sounds—at first indistinct, grew definite and alarming. There were cries, fierce shouts, the wailing of children, a horrible unearthly, continuous chant, which he had never before heard, and was too bewildered then to identify with the "keening" of which Erin had sometimes spoken. As he hastened onwards he could even distinguish the sound of blows.

Rushing eagerly round the shoulder of a hill, he came at length in sight of the place where this medley was going on. A long straggling village climbing up the flank of the hill on which he stood, composed for the most part of thatched cottages of the poorest description, and surrounded by small patches of corn and potatoes. These details were unconsciously taken in by Mark, and returned to him later, when he mentally reviewed the scene; for the time being, his attention was entirely absorbed by the strife before him. The lonely, desolate valley beneath the village was alive with people, struggling, fighting, shrieking. There was some firing, wild and disconnected, on the part of the insurgents—if the poor distracted belligerents, armed, for the most part, with scythes and sickles, could be dignified by such a title. After the single volley which Mark had already heard, and which, if truth be told, was fired over the heads of the combatants, the soldiery contented

themselves with driving the peasants before them at the point of the bayonet. There were also police, laying about them with their batons, and receiving somewhat rough handling from their opponents. The sheriff and his officers were there too, and the magistrate who had read the Riot Act, and other functionaries; but Mark did not seek to identify them, all his energies being concentrated on the endeavour to discover the whereabouts of Erin. After seeking the slight figure in vain from his post of vantage, he ran hastily downwards towards the village. As he drew nearer, he saw that some rude attempts had been made to barricade the houses. At one point, however, these had been broken down, and the inhabitants of two or three cabins—chiefly women and children—forced out into the open. A crippled woman had been carried out and deposited on the ground a little to the rear of one of these cabins, and the tide of battle having turned — as, indeed, it was bound to turn—in favour of the evicting party, who were distinctly gaining ground, and forcing their adversaries backwards up the hill towards the village, this poor creature was in imminent danger of being trampled to death. In spite of his anxiety on Erin's behalf, Mark felt bound, in common humanity, to come to the woman's rescue. As he bent over her to raise her in his arms, she turned on him a look of such abject terror that it haunted him for many a day. He lifted her, however, in silence—she was a mere skeleton, easy to carry—and was turning to convey her to some safer place, when his eyes were suddenly attracted by other eyes—the startled blue eyes of Erin. She

had suddenly emerged from a cabin adjoining that near which he stood. She looked pale and bewildered, and in her arms she held fast a little baby!

At another moment Mark could have smiled. He had expected—dreaded—to find this Amazon in the thick of the melée, leading on the unfortunate little company who owed, perhaps, much of their present dangerous plight to her well-meant, but misguided interference; and lo! here she stood, in that very attitude which a man finds most charming and most attractive—when assumed by the girl he loves—his Amazon was holding and fondling a little child! The instincts of womanhood would assert themselves, it seemed, in the most unlikely situations.

Thus the two looked at each other, in astonishment. If Mark was surprised to find her soothing a baby in close proximity to a desperate struggle, still more incongruous must it have been to her to behold Mark —fastidious Mark—supporting in his arms a ragged, emaciated, peasant woman!

This mutual recognition was the work of a few seconds; then, imperiously calling to Erin to wait where she was till he returned, Mark hastened to convey his burden to a place of safety.

When he ran back, however, to the spot where he had left Erin, she was nowhere to be seen. After a few minutes' distracted search he again descried her, and this time his heart leaped in renewed alarm and indignation. As though the mere sight of him had conjured up afresh her militant propensities, Erin had now taken the very course which he had formerly dreaded. She, too, had deposited her charge somewhere in security, and had now climbed upon a low

stone wall, and there, standing erect, her head thrown back, her face alight with that inspired look which it sometimes wore, she was calling out in clear, decided tones to her ill-fated adherents, who were gradually losing heart and retreating in increasing confusion. Some, indeed, had given up all attempts at resistance, and were hastening towards the wall on which she stood, intending to take refuge behind it.

"Courage, men, courage!" Mark heard her cry. "You are ten to one! If you stand firm, the victory must be yours."

Mark rushed through the little cornfield enclosed by the wall, and, pushing impatiently aside all who came in his way, sprang up beside her.

"Come down," he cried hoarsely. "This is no fit place for you, for any woman." Throwing his arm round her waist, he forced her to descend with him, and endeavoured to lead her away, but she broke from him, and sought to return to her former post. "I tell you, you must come," he cried frantically. "You shall come."

The loud, wrathful tones and angry face caught the attention of a man who had just leaped into the enclosure. Here was a stranger—doubtless an enemy, —laying violent hands on their lady, their beloved Miss Erin, their friend and ally. He, at least, should not escape!

Rushing towards Mark, whose attention was wholly engrossed with Erin, the man raised the rusty sickle which he carried, aiming a blow at his throat.

Mark would doubtless have received a deadly wound had it not been for Erin, who, turning to rebuke him for his interference, saw the impending danger, and flung herself before him, throwing her arms wildly

round his neck. It was too late to avert the threatened calamity: the sickle fell, not, indeed, with the force originally intended; for one of Erin's friends, more quick to see her peril than her would-be-avenger, caught his descending arm.

His strength, however, was not sufficient to ward off the blow; the point of the blade entered the fleshy part of Erin's shoulder, inflicting a deep wound, and in a moment the blood gushed forth.

Mark scarcely knew what happened next.

Lifting the slight form, and clasping it in anguish to his breast, he forced his way through all who sought to oppose him, and ran, with a speed which he had not hitherto supposed himself capable of, away from the scene of strife. After panting up the incline to the rear of the village, he found his task comparatively easy. One or two of the peasants pursued him for some little way, but gave up the chase, finding it useless to try to overtake him; and having, indeed, quite enough to do to attend to their own immediate concerns. Besides, Erin's recent action, and the shocked and tender concern in Mark's face, were sufficient guarantees that he was her friend. Mark's way now lay for the most part down-hill; and he sped onwards without pausing, until at a turn of the path he came upon the car. Then, halting and laying Erin tenderly on the turf beside the road, he gazed anxiously at her white, unconscious face. For a moment his heart stood still: she looked like death. But he soon satisfied himself that her heart was still beating. The blood had soaked through her clothing; his coat sleeve was wet with it, his hand red. Hastily tearing his handkerchief into strips, and supplementing these by pieces cut from the light cotton

skirt which Erin wore, he made a bandage which he thought might in some measure stem the flow.

The driver, after a few expressions of horrified amazement, gazed at him in silence; but, all at once, lifting the tattered cushion which covered the well of his car, he drew an old, ragged green rug from this receptacle.

"Throw that over her," he said briefly. "It wouldn't do for anybody to see her that way."

Mark glanced at the man hastily and gratefully, touched at the delicacy of the thought, and was surprised to find tears in his eyes. However, there was no time to be lost in conversation; so, enfolding Erin in the wrap, and again lifting her tenderly in his arms, he climbed carefully on the car with her. The driver did not need to be told to use all possible speed, and urged his horse to a gallop. And thus it came to pass that Erin's wild childish dreams of long ago were in a measure fulfilled, and that it was under draperies of blood-stained green that the Irish Joan of Arc was borne away from the field of her first and last battle.

CHAPTER XV

POET OR PATRIOT?

ERIN'S wound, though deep and painful, was luckily not dangerous; but the shock to her nervous system had been so great that she was prostrated for several days. The doctor, summoned with all speed from a distance of several miles, proved, like many Irish country practitioners, remarkably clever and efficient. It was explained to him that Erin had unfortunately happened to be present at the recent rising, and had been accidentally wounded. The doctor was a discreet man and asked no further questions, though he must secretly have been a good deal astonished at the untoward chance which brought the young lady to such a place at such a time. Mark, meeting him downstairs after his first visit to the patient, managed to convey to him the advisability of being silent as to the nature of the case; girls sometimes did foolish things, he said, and it was always a pity when a thoughtless act was talked about—serious consequences might sometimes ensue. The doctor nodded, remarking that he did not in any case consider it professional to discuss his cases with outsiders; and the two parted with a perfect understanding between them.

The car-driver was also "squared," and, indeed, was not inclined in any case to gossip about the affair. No one else, as Mark reflected, was likely

to connect Erin with the recent affray. He knew the occupants of the farmhouse could be counted on, and the poor wretches yonder, many of whom were now sorely expiating their rashness, would not be likely to betray her. He breathed more freely as the days passed; it was evident that Erin's connection with the sad business had passed unnoticed. He remained at the farmhouse—indeed, he could not bring himself to leave the place; and he had a good excuse for staying, for Joan was determined to nurse her friend until she grew better, and he had promised his uncle and aunt to take charge of Joan. The accommodation, the best his poor hosts could afford, was certainly of the most limited kind, and the fare very different from that to which he was accustomed; though Mrs Riley, in her anxiety to make Erin's friends comfortable, occasionally lent a hand with the cooking. Still, what did anything matter? She was there, and he was near her!

Meanwhile, Erin remained in a condition bordering on collapse—a merciful condition, as she was afterwards tempted to think; for as she gained strength, the horror of the experience through which she had passed increased and grew more acute. She was haunted by the sight of those wild suffering faces, by the sound of those strange cries, and the yet more terrible, more sickening sound of blows. She was humiliated and maddened by the recollection of what she stigmatised as her own cowardice, her foolish bewilderment. In the hour of trial, the crucial hour, when her wits should have been clear and her spirit brave, she had suffered herself to be paralysed by a terror which she had not strength of will to conquer, a disgust and dread at the

sights and sounds that necessarily accompanied the strife, which might, indeed, have been looked for in a silly schoolgirl, but was criminal in one who aspired to lead her fellow-men. Not until Mark had appeared on the scene had she been able to rally her courage, and then it had been too late.

As to the sequel of the affair, Erin could not think of it without hot, miserable blushes. She had saved him—yes, but could she ever look him in the face again?

Her wound healed rapidly, thanks to her youth and perfect health; and, in spite of her uneasiness of mind, she began to gain strength. One day the doctor announced that she might move into another room, and Mrs Riley and Joan accordingly carried her down to the parlour.

"You look more like yourself to-day," cried Joan joyfully, when she was established on the little horse-hair sofa. "You will let Mark see you for a few moments, will you not? He has been so anxious about you, poor fellow."

"Oh no," cried Erin quickly; "no, I don't want to see him. I can't see him!"

"Very well," returned Joan soothingly; "you shan't if you don't like. But still, poor Mark has been awfully miserable!"

"Joan, you know he would have been killed if—if I had not thrown myself before him. Did he tell you about it?"

"Yes, he told me you came between him and the man who aimed a blow at his throat. He could not speak much about it, but I know what he must have thought and felt. My darling, it was brave and noble of you!"

Joan's own voice faltered as she spoke, and she

bent down to kiss her friend; but Erin turned away her head a little impatiently.

"Don't talk nonsense! I couldn't help doing it—I should have done the same for anybody else. I didn't want him to be killed—I didn't want anybody to be killed. O Joan, I do hope no one was killed. Tell me the truth."

"I am quite sure there were no deaths," returned Joan decidedly. "I know, because I asked Mark, and he has made constant inquiries. There were a good many nasty wounds, but none of them are likely to be fatal. The soldiers fired over the heads of the people, do you know, Erin?"

"I saw one policeman," pursued Erin, scarcely heeding her, "with a horrible gash in his head. The blood was pouring from it, and his face looked ghastly. O Joan, when one reads about battles, and hand-to-hand struggles, and hardly-won victories, one does not realise what a dreadful thing bloodshed is! Joan, if that policeman dies I shall feel like a murderer! His face haunts me. He was quite a young man, with a round, boyish face. Perhaps at this moment his mother and his sweetheart are mourning over him! If he dies, I shall never forgive myself. You must find out if he is likely to recover."

"I will tell Mark to find out," returned Joan. "You can't think how good he has been to all the sufferers on both sides. There is a poor crippled woman—I believe she belongs to some of the people who were turned out of their houses—she nearly died of fright—Mark says he can't forget her face—well, he has been looking after her, and has arranged for her and the rest of the women and children to be taken care of."

"Do you know what was the end of—of the whole

business?" asked Erin in tremulous tones. She had been longing to ask this question before, but her courage had failed her.

"I am afraid you won't much like to hear about it," returned Joan hesitatingly.

"Tell me at once, all the same—it is better to know the worst."

"Well, there wasn't much more fighting after you were taken away. The soldiers overpowered the people and forced them to give up their arms, and they—they took away a good many of them."

"To prison, do you mean?"

"I suppose so," returned Joan unwillingly.

Erin threw herself back on her pillows and closed her eyes.

"I ought to go there too," she said, after a pause. "I was quite as much to blame as they. I encouraged them—I egged them on."

"My dear child," said Joan, patting her head with a little soothing manner very like her mother's, "they 'd have done it if you hadn't come here at all. You don't suppose these people would risk so much just because a pretty little lady told them to? Not they, my dear. This business has been brewing for a long time. I 've been reading all about it in the papers; and you know, my dear Erin, though of course you won't admit it, your poor people have, in a great measure, brought their misfortunes on themselves. Well, perhaps that is a harsh way of putting it, but they *have* behaved badly in some ways."

"Oh, of course you take the other side!" returned Erin petulantly.

"My own little beloved," returned Joan, who kept a store of choice and extravagant endearments for

the benefit of her friend, "don't you think it is as well to admit that there is another side? Sometimes I fancy you ignore it altogether. You see, you have only just discovered that policemen can have sweethearts and mothers like other people. You are an enthusiast, you know, and as long as you live, you will take an unnecessarily strong view of things. You were made to be a poet, and not a warrior!"

"I begin to think myself," groaned Erin, "that I was not meant to be a warrior. When it came to the point, I was so frightened—I felt so sick. I lost my head completely. O Joan, how foolish I have been—wicked and foolish. I meant to do a great deal of mischief, though I may not have succeeded! But all these days, I have been thinking—it was wrong to try and stir up the people. There was no chance of success for them; and even if they had succeeded, it would only have brought more misery on them in the long run. How easily that handful of soldiers overpowered those hundreds of undisciplined men. The organisation tells, of course. If our people were to rise in greater numbers, as I hoped, and civil war ensued, the results would be disastrous for us. I have had one taste—a very small taste of what civil war is like, and I don't want any more of it."

"Civil war," gasped Joan. "Good gracious, Erin, I had no idea you had such bloodthirsty notions in your head!"

"Oh, don't say *bloodthirsty*—don't talk about blood! I can't bear the sound of the word. Joan, do you know I feel as if my beautiful mother-land were dishonoured and insulted by such scenes as these. Think of it, Joan, those solemn hills looking

down at that horrible struggle—the scythes and sickles that should be used to cut the peaceful grass and corn turned into weapons—oh, it is dreadful!"

"Erin, Erin, do I not say well, that you are meant to be a poet? Mark told mamma once, and she often quotes the saying, that your views were partly those of a poet, and partly those of a child. But all this talk is very bad for an invalid—you are getting quite flushed. Lie quiet, and I will read you a nice little foolish, frivolous novel. Mamma sent me a batch the other day."

Erin had indeed flushed at the mention of Mark's name, and she did not oppose Joan's suggestion, though it is to be feared that she took in but little of the sense of the volume alluded to. The quiet monotonous tone of Joan's voice, however, produced a soothing effect; which, in conjunction with her weakness and the fatigue consequent on the unaccustomed exertions of the morning, at length induced drowsiness. Joan closed the book, seeing that her friend had fallen into a deep sleep, and sat very still beside her.

By-and-by Mrs Riley came in, nodding with evident satisfaction on discovering the state of affairs. She crossed the room with astonishing lightness, considering her substantial form, and with much silent mouthing and a great deal of gesticulation contrived to make Joan understand that she had come to take her place.

The girl thereupon stole away in search of Mark, and Mrs Riley installed herself in her vacant chair, throwing a handkerchief over her head and composing herself for a nap in her turn. She had not, however, yet begun to doze, when the handle of the door turned softly and Mark entered. He stood just

within the room, placing a finger on his lip to enjoin silence, and for some moments gazed attentively at Erin. Mrs Riley stared hard at him, but could make out nothing from his face: it was quiet, serious, but betrayed nothing of what the man might be feeling. Nevertheless, as Mrs Riley shrewdly opined, the man was probably feeling a good deal.

The intensity of his gaze effected the unconscious Erin. She stirred, her eyelids quivered; she opened her eyes just in time to see the door close, but not to identify the retreating form. She raised her head and looked inquiringly at Mrs Riley.

"Are you here, dear Mrs Riley? I suppose it was Joan who went out just now."

"It was not Miss Joan, then," replied the old lady, who was, for unexplained reasons, in the most jubilant mood. "'Pon my word, though, it was a shame to disturb you, and you in such a lovely sleep!"

"Who was it went out just now?" inquired Erin rather sharply.

"Wouldn't you like to know?" retorted Mrs Riley waggishly. "Maybe you could guess now, if you put your mind to it." She winked with both eyes together, clapping a hand on each plump knee. "It was your beau, then!"

"Oh," said Erin, falling back on her pillows again; "but he isn't that, Mrs Riley, and I wish you hadn't let him in. What did he come here for?"

"Faith, my dear, he didn't ask to be let in. He just walked in and stood there as quiet as a mouse, lookin' at you. I suppose that's what he came for. There he stood," repeated Mrs Riley, with unction, "and not a word out of him; but just lookin', lookin', as if he'd eat ye up with his two eyes."

This hyperbole discomposed Erin a good deal: she flushed hotly and turned away her face. Mrs Riley chuckled

"A nicer young man—and a kinder-hearted and more pleasant-spoken than your gentleman, Erin, my dear, I wouldn't wish to see. 'Pon my word, you're a lucky girl!"

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that, Mrs Riley," returned Erin pettishly. "He isn't anything at all to me."

"Oh he isn't, isn't he?" retorted Mrs Riley derisively. "Moya! what's he stopping here for, then? Hanging about the door every time I come in or out of your room, and asking me twenty times a day how you are—not that he'll tease me with questions, you know—he's always quite the gentleman—he just asks me very quiet and pleasant, 'How is she now, Mrs Riley?' or, 'How is our invalid getting on?' and then I tell him, and he'll go off with himself; but in a little while he'll be back again—'Is there anything, do you think, that she would fancy? Game or anything. I could telegraph to Dublin for it.' And, mind you, he'll walk miles and miles to the telegraph office, quite delighted. Sure, he used to be goin' about like a ghost the first days after you were hurt. Always quiet, you know, and makin' no fuss, but lookin' as pale! It's my opinion," summed up Mrs Riley emphatically, "that if he isn't anything to ye now, he wants to be."

Erin did not argue the matter, and after a pause Mrs Riley continued, "I don't think you could do better, Erin, though sometimes I've fancied that maybe you'd marry a lord. You might, if you liked—there's a good many does be in want of a

bit of money these times, and wouldn't be averse to gettin' a beautiful young lady into the bargain. But, after all, I don't know that lords always makes the best husbands. There was one I used to see as tipsy as any poor fellow you'd meet on the road. And he never was called anything but 'Sherry-and-Seltzer.'"

Erin laughed, but after a pause she asked diffidently, eyeing Mrs Riley the while, "Do you like Mr Wimbourne?"

"Like him? Him and me's the very best of friends! He'll joke me," pursued Mrs Riley, "and go on at me sometimes till I nearly die laughing! And he's as pleasant and good-natured! Sure, he and I play cribbage in the evenings mostly now. 'Pon me word, Erin, you'll have to look out—if you're not up and about soon, who knows that I won't be stealing a march on you!"

Here Mrs Riley winked again, and fell to rocking herself to and fro, clapping her hands together, chuckling delightedly the while. Erin was obliged to laugh too, but soon became grave. So Mark was not shocked, after all, by Mrs Riley's homely little ways—he and she were the best of friends, as she said. She was glad to think it—glad that he was above the pettiness with which she had credited him. *Les amis de nos amis sont nos amis*, of course—it was probably for her sake that he had endeavoured to secure Mrs Riley's good-will, just as it was as much out of regard for her as from natural humanity that he had been so active in endeavouring to alleviate the misery of the sufferers from the recent outbreak. She could not help feeling touched and pleased, and yet, what was the use of it all?

CHAPTER XVI

ANTIGONE!

MARK had been deeply hurt at Erin's refusal to see him. He listened, however, with an occasional smile, to Joan's account of her recent conversation with her, making no comment, but at the end quietly announcing his determination of stealing a look at her.

"It cannot offend her since she is asleep," he said. "I must see her—I must see how she looks, and satisfy myself that she is not much the worse for all she has gone through."

"Have you satisfied yourself?" inquired Joan, when a few minutes later he returned to her.

"Yes—she looks lovely—I wish she would look at me. If I were the high-minded individual you once thought me, Joan, I ought to snap my fingers and say, 'If she be not fair for me, what care I how fair she be?'—but I don't, you see."

"You haven't changed your mind, then," inquired Joan innocently.

"No, Joan—it will surprise you very much to hear it, but I have not." He paused, looking hesitatingly at Joan with a query trembling on his lips, but he forbore to speak it, merely remarking after a time, "I'm afraid there's not much use in my staying here."

"Why?—because she refused to see you? My

dear Mark, I would not think too much about that —any other girl would do the same thing."

"Do you think so?" inquired Mark, gazing at her pensively.

"You see it is very natural she should feel a little queer. I think it will be all right in the end," added Joan oracularly.

Mark was more consoled by this innuendo than he would have cared to own. His hopes had risen unreasonably high of late. Erin had shown so plainly the strength and ardour of her love, and the lesson which she had received had been so severe, that it seemed to him the fictitious barrier between them could no longer exist, even in her imagination, and that his dreams would be realised at last.

Erin's recent rebuff had somewhat dashed these hopes, however, and he was proportionately delighted at Joan's intimation. If anyone knew Erin, surely Joan did.

Nevertheless, when a day or two passed, and Erin still persistently declined to see him, the matter assumed a serious aspect. He could no longer postpone his departure to England; the elections would very shortly take place. Lady Tweedale had also written to desire Joan's return. Erin was not yet strong enough to be moved, but Mrs Riley would take good care of her. The oddly assorted little party was about to be broken up, and everything was still undecided as regarded the prospects of its two chief members. Mark could not, however, leave without making one more effort to set things right. Surely Erin could not refuse to grant him an interview, if only to enable him to say good-bye.

This time Erin did unwillingly consent to see him, and on the morning of departure he entered the parlour where she was. She had been sitting in an arm-chair, but rose involuntarily when he entered.

He had meant to be very calm and composed, to talk to her quietly, to endeavour by clear forcible arguments to bring her to see reason. But somehow at the sight of the fragile little figure that looked so unfit to battle with the world alone, the pale beautiful face turned to him timidly, the eyes full of unconscious entreaty, his self-possession deserted him. For once the cool, sedate Mr Mark Wimbourne completely lost his head. He crossed the room quickly, and taking her cold trembling hands in his, kissed them repeatedly.

She tried to draw them away, but he held them fast.

"What is the use of resisting fate?" he cried. "You are mine, and I am yours—I will not let you go."

"How can you say such things?" she stammered. "Why do you come here?—it only gives us useless pain. Have we not talked it all out before? Nothing is changed."

"Much is changed," returned Mark, unconsciously tightening his grasp of the little hands.

"Do you mean," she cried, reddening fiercely, "that you think you have a claim on me now, because of what happened the other day?"

"I do think so," he returned passionately. "I have a claim, a sacred claim—the claim of the man you love well enough to give your life for! Oh, my dear, it is time to have done with phrases and follies! You are ten times, a thousand times dearer to me now than you were before. I was bewitched by you before—I will not deny it, your very contradictoriness fascinated me—but this—this is something different."

Struggle as she might, a tide of unwilling joy swept over Erin. After all, she did love him, and there was happiness in merely listening to such words as these. Of late, she had tormented herself with the idea that her recent harshness had caused her to fall in his eyes, that in spite of his attachment to her, her conduct had called forth his displeasure. She could not forget the wrath and scorn of the tone with which he had told her that such a scene as that in which she had taken so active a part was unfit for any woman. It was as much on this account as any other that she had so long dreaded to see him. The revulsion of feeling was now overwhelming.

"I thought you would despise me," she cried involuntarily.

"My sweet, I never loved you so well. I have found you out, you see," he added almost jubilantly, for the mobile face before him unconsciously told its tale—"my Will o' the Wisp, I have found you out to be a woman! Yes, the situation resolves itself into this: we stand face to face, woman and man, and we love each other. You want me and I want you—and I will have you."

He drew her gently towards him, encircling her with his arms at last.

"My little Erin," he whispered, "do you not feel that you want me to love you and to take care of you, and cherish you always? Surely you feel that nothing divides us now."

"Nothing divides us!" Erin looked at him. How changed his face was, transformed and transfigured—he had then changed in other ways, too. Could it really be that she had conquered at last?

"Nothing divides us," she repeated with a little

irrepressible sob. "Oh, Mark, dear Mark, are you quite sure? Nothing?"

"I am quite sure," returned Mark. The little proud head was at last nestling on his shoulder—the wilful little hand was resting confidingly in his. He scarcely knew what he was saying.

"You — you will love my people, Mark?" she asked.

"You shall teach me to love them," he replied. "With your sweet lips so near, my darling, there is nothing I could not learn."

Erin could not speak: her heart was too full.

"And to think," pursued Mark tenderly, "that all these days you have kept me away from you! Only at the last, the very last moment you have relented. Never mind, we must make up for it when I come back."

"When you come back," echoed Erin, a little disconsolately. "You must go, I suppose? Yes, of course, Joan couldn't travel alone, and Lady Tweedale wants her to go home at once."

"Never mind," returned Mark joyously, "I will come back as soon as ever I can be spared; and when the elections are over, then, love, we will have a quiet little wedding, and wander away together—and I will show you——"

When the elections are over! Erin raised her head and sought to disengage herself. The phrase had fallen like a thunderbolt. Was it possible—could it be possible that Fate was about to cheat her again?

"When the elections are over," she repeated blankly. "I do not understand."

Mark looked at her for a moment in silence, but

the expression of his face did not alter, his spirits were not dashed. Dear, sweet, tender little creature, she had clung to him, she had admitted her need of his love, she had shown plainly how dear he was to her—nothing, indeed, could part them now.

"The polling for our division of the county will take place in about a fortnight," he said. "I cannot desert my post, you know; but when this piece of business is once done with, you and I will have a holiday."

"Do you mean," she cried, almost harshly, "that after this, Mark, you still intend to stand? I—thought you had given up the idea. Surely you meant me to understand you had given it up."

"I cannot give it up," he said, speaking more gravely than before. "Erin, there is scarcely anything you could not persuade me to do, but you will not ask me to do this. It would be unfair to throw over my friends at the last moment; and, besides, they think—rightly or wrongly—that I have a better chance than another man would have."

"Then it is all a mistake," gasped Erin; "you mean everything to be just as before. You will give up nothing. Oh, it was cruel and treacherous of you to lead me on."

Mark came down from the heights, and an expression of dogged determination replaced the former joy and triumph in his face.

"There is no mistake," he replied firmly. "I said that nothing divided us. Nothing does divide us. Do you think you owe nothing to me? That I am to be trifled with, cast aside because of a mere prejudice? I tell you I will not be put aside. I have come into your life, and I will remain there. This is

the turning-point of both our lives, Erin; let everything else go. We remain to each other; we belong to each other."

"But you," cried Erin, with a choked voice, "you will give up nothing for me! You even say I must not ask you to give up this plan. O Mark—" suddenly turning towards him, and clinging to him, entreating—"Mark, I do ask you, I beg of you! Give it up for my sake! Do you owe nothing to me? I love you, and you love me, and yet you will condemn me to misery! Can that be right? Can that be honourable? Mark, Mark," she continued more wildly, "do this for me, and I will be your devoted and obedient wife. I will interfere with you in nothing else—I will trust you! Though we may never think alike, I will trust you."

Her hot tears were falling on his hands. For one moment Mark was tempted, probably more fiercely tempted than he had ever yet been in the course of his well-regulated life, to take her at her word. After all, he would not be the first man who deemed the world well lost for love. But it was only for a moment: then he said very gently—

"My darling, you do not understand—there are some things a man cannot do. I have given my word—I cannot draw back now. But you will trust me, Erin, even though my point of view is incomprehensible to you? Believe me, when I tell you that if I could in conscience do what you ask, I would. I would give up for your sake my career—my ambitions—everything!"

"And I," said Erin, speaking firmly, though with white lips, "would also give up all for you, except my principles. I, too, am pledged—I, too, am bound by

a solemn promise. I have sworn to belong wholly to my country—I will never give myself to one who has resolved to deny her her rights and liberties."

"Erin, Erin, this is folly! cruel and perverse folly! Child, open your eyes, and see things as they are. You are deluding yourself, making a kind of fetish of this imaginary personification of Ireland. All these vague, poetical, romantic ideas go for nothing—your Dream-Ireland does not exist—as for the real Ireland, I will learn to know and love it in your company. I can see for myself that it is beautiful."

"And yet you would withhold from it national life! What mockery, Mark! Let us have an end of it! Either promise what I ask, or leave me in peace."

"Think well what you are doing, Erin," said Mark passionately, almost fiercely, "a moment like this is almost like the moment of death. Then everything slips away, and we stand alone, face to face with God. Now we must face each other—we are driven towards each other—we have claims, each on the other, too sacred to be set aside. Erin, you would have died for me—we cannot forget it. If you had died of that wound, remember you would not have given your life for your country, but for me."

"All the same, Mark," said Erin, almost inarticulately, "I cannot marry you if you carry out your purpose. You said just now there were some things a man could not do. There is this one thing that I cannot do—and I will not."

She disengaged herself abruptly as she said the last words, and before he could stop her, darted past him and left the room.

He heard her mounting the stairs more slowly, for there her weakness came against her, and lock her-

self into the room above. He remained in the same attitude as that in which she had left him, staring blankly at the door, until Joan entered. Then he pulled himself together, and endeavoured to entrench himself behind his customary rampart of calm unconcern. But Joan was too quick for him. After one glance she went up to him, laying her hand anxiously on his arm.

"No luck, Mark?"

He drew a long breath.

"I am afraid not, and yet I can hardly believe it. We must be starting directly, I suppose—Joan, just run up and ask Erin if her decision is quite final. Tell her," he added hoarsely, "that we are going—going immediately."

Joan mounted the stairs quickly, and Mark heard her tap at the door overhead; then, after a moment's parley, she returned more slowly.

"She says it is quite final, Mark."

"Very well," said Mark.

Half-an-hour later, Erin heard the car drive away, and stood by the window, listening stonily, until the sound of the wheels was lost in the distance. Then she sank down in a forlorn heap on the floor.

EPILOGUE

AFTERMATH

ONCE more Erin sat alone on the familiar hill-top where she had dreamed away so many hours in her childhood. It was a bright, cloudless, September day, and the valley below glowed golden in the sunlight. Through the still air the notes of a lark overhead sounded piercingly sweet. Erin sat in the attitude she had so often assumed of old; her feet crossed, her hands clasped round her knees.

For the last week she had been staying with Mrs Riley at Glenmor. She had been so unwell after the departure of Mark and Joan that her friend had been seriously alarmed. As soon as she had regained some measure of strength, she had implored to be allowed to leave a spot which had grown hateful to her, and they had journeyed by slow degrees to Glenmor; Mrs Riley having consented to stay there with her for some time, in the hope that the beautiful air would revive her, and that a return to the old scenes and associations might restore some measure of animation. For Erin had looked and felt broken-spirited since her last crucial disappointment. It seemed to her that her life was broken up, laid waste—nothing remained to her.

As she sat here in the sunlight, the memory of her old plans and dreams returned to her with almost unendurable poignancy. How much she had hoped

to do with her life in those days, and now how useless, how purposeless was this life! She was powerless to work for her own people — and, for Ireland at large, what could she do? Her past efforts had resulted only in failure, and it seemed to her that, do what she might in the future, failure would still await her. She could have borne her own personal loneliness and anguish if her sacrifice could have lightened the lot of others. But, with all her strong aims and high resolves, what was she but a miserable, useless unit, who had carried through no piece of work with success—none, except the breaking of her own heart, and the spoiling of the life of the man she loved?

Mark's face haunted her, as it had not ceased to haunt her since their final parting; now the remembrance of that reproachful, almost pleading, look in his eyes seemed positively to stab her, and all at once, with a groan, she flung herself down on the sun-lit soil, burying her face in her hands.

She had lain thus a little while, all absorbed in the turmoil of her own passion and her own sorrow, when suddenly she felt, in some inexplicable way, that she was not alone. It was fancy surely, which, when she raised her head, conjured up within a few paces of her the very image which had dominated her troubled thoughts.

"Mark!" she cried falteringly, pressing her hand across her eyes. "Not Mark! I am dreaming!"

Was not Mark at that very moment hundreds of miles away, busy with his new triumphs?

Yet it was no wraith, but the man himself—intensely, exultantly alive — who now approached and bent over her.

"Dreaming, Erin?" he said. "Do you sometimes dream of me, then, here where you have had so many other dreams and plans? I recognise the place, you see—they told me I should find you here. Ah, sweet, why do I find you with wet eyes? Why are your eyes wet, Erin?"

"Can you ask?" she cried, with an irrepressible burst of sobs. "Have I not failed in everything? You talk of my hopes and dreams—oh, how much I planned to do! and what have I done except bring misery on those I love."

He looked at her with a kind of joyous triumph which she could not understand, and said gently—

"Who knows — you may do great things yet. Those childish dreams of yours may be realised in some way you did not think of—a better way, Erin. One day, perhaps, we may work out some of your projects—together!"

"Do not mock me!" cried Erin fiercely. "Why do you come here? You only torture me."

She sprang to her feet, stretching out trembling hands, as though to push him to one side; but he caught them and held them fast.

"I have come to bring you news," he said, still speaking very gently, though his face was bright with extraordinary joy. "I have travelled all night to tell you. If you have failed, Erin, so have I. Congratulate me."

He paused a moment, looking down at her, his eyes brimming with ecstatic laughter.

"Our elections took place yesterday," he went on, "and the other fellow has got in. I tried my best, but they wouldn't have me. They have cast me out of Eden, you see—and now"—dropping his

voice as he drew her towards him—"now I want my Eve."

"Cast out of Eden, Mark!" repeated Erin tremulously. "O Mark, say rather 'entering in!' This land of mine, in spite of its sorrows, has always been to me a Paradise."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mark bent his face, laughing still, but very tender, to hers, so lovely in its eager expectancy.

"Where Eve is," he said, "must always be my Paradise!"

THE END

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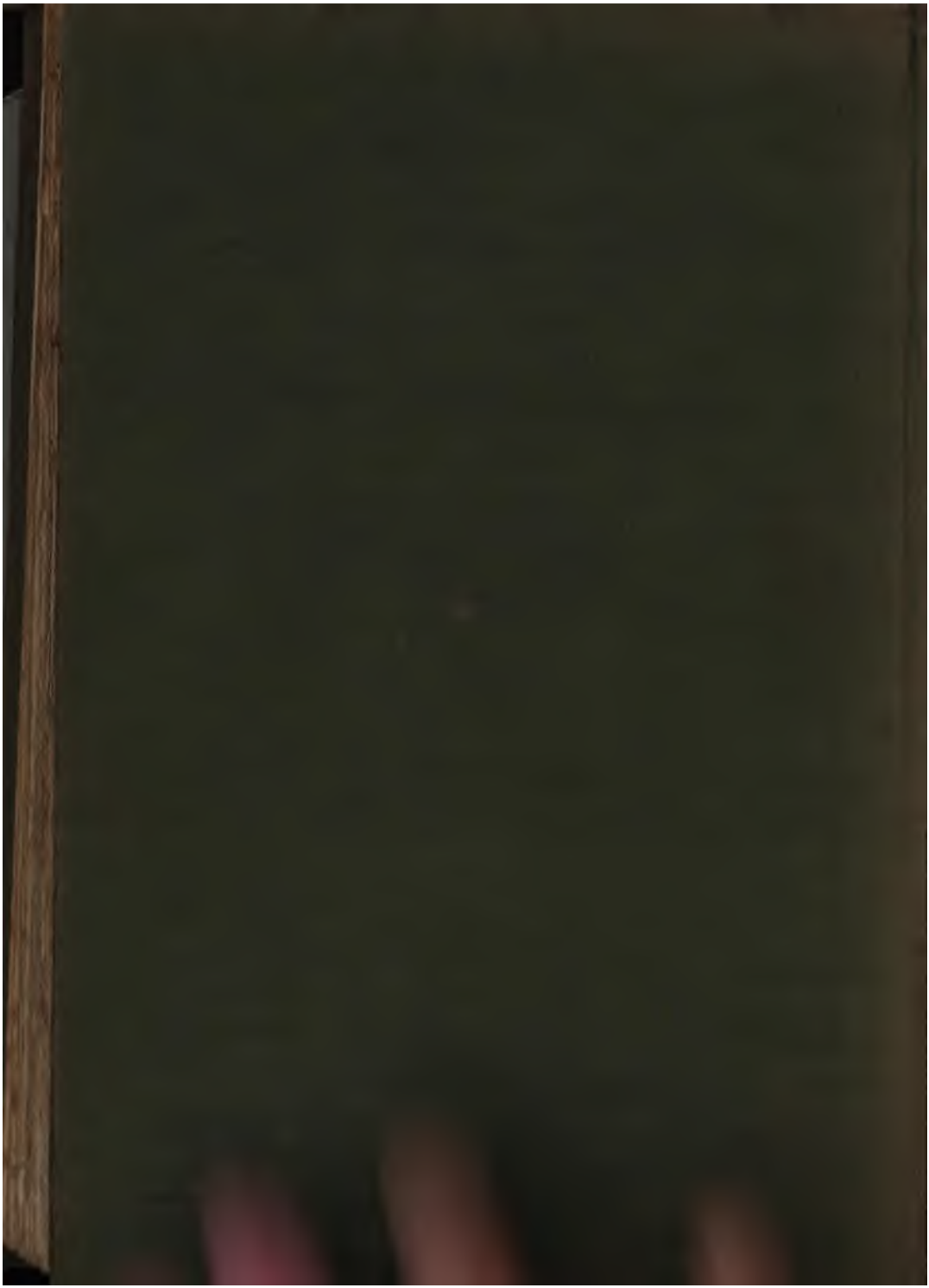
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